



THE INDEPENDENT

Nº 3,276

MONDAY 21 APRIL 1997

WEATHER: Cool with some sunshine and drizzle

(IR45p) 40p

regions

Out there, it's not over yet

Independent goes to the country

Last week, *The Independent* took its reporters off the Blair and Major campaign buses and, with other political writers, they went out into key constituencies to gauge the mood of the country.

The starting point was a sense that Labour's

large lead in the opinion polls may not be a complete reflection of voters' intentions.

The full diversity of their views and reasons for deciding who to support on 1 May, which emerged from dozens of interviews, can be found on pages 6 and 7.

Anthony Bevis

Political Editor

Victory on May Day is by no means in the bag for Tony Blair, and there are no signs of the landslide suggested by the opinion polls, according to a nationwide survey by carried out by *The Independent*.

With just 10 days to go to polling day, the verdict from the doorsteps is that while Labour can win with a working majority, the voters are swaying and John Major still has everything to play for.

Labour's campaign co-ordinator in Tamworth, a seat which would give Mr Blair a working majority of about 20 in the new Parliament, told *The Independent*: "It ain't over till it's all over... If there's a good football match on the television, or a dramatic storyline on *Coronation Street*, Labour voters are notorious for not bothering."

That grassroots Labour diffidence was reflected by a score of senior Tories, experienced front-line politicians, who told *The Independent* that they were "baffled", "astonished", and "amazed" by the continuing Labour lead in the polls - because it was not reflected in their own doorstep canvassing.

Mr Major told the *Sunday Telegraph* yesterday: "I find the opinion polls baffling. They bear no relationship either to the feel out there, or to the detailed canvass returns we are getting back from the constituencies... Curious things are resonating on the doorstep."

That could explain why the Prime Minister took the strange tactical decision to spend three days on Europe last week - because Europe is undoubtedly an issue that is starting to play with certain sections of the electorate.

But the risks of that gamble broke with a vengeance yesterday, with Tory leadership contenders Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Michael Howard, the European Home Secretary, openly rowing over the threat posed by Brussels.

Mr Howard told GMTV's *Sunday* programme that the next European summit, at Amsterdam in June "would in-

deed put our survival as a nation state in question."

The Chancellor told BBC television's *On the Record*: "We should not be imagining plots against us. I don't think the survival of Britain as a nation state is at risk because of our membership of the European Union."

The Independent reports from the constituency battlegrounds show that there could be as much distrust of Mr Blair, and for what he might do in office, as there is for Mr Major and what he has done in office.

While there are undoubtedly many voters who are disaffected with the Conservatives, they are still uncertain whether to vote for Labour. Some remember when Labour was last in office, others are simply turned off by Mr Blair's smile, and others are worried Labour is becoming too right-wing.

The survey of constituencies shows that while Labour can expect to win Redditch, giving the party the largest number of seats in a new parliament but no overall majority, and that it might well win Tamworth, putting it on a majority of about 20. Other seats - and a larger majority - could be out of reach as things stood last week.

Increases in tax still scar voters' attitudes, and Mr Major reflected that yesterday with a rare - if qualified - admission. He said in a Radio 4 phone-in that although the overall tax burden was now back to the same level as it had been at the last election, "I had hoped to reduce it because the recession was deeper and longer than we thought."

In a recession, the government's income falls from taxation, fewer house sales, things like that, and in order to protect people, and extra expenditure for people who were unemployed, we needed to put up taxes.

"I regretted that, I didn't want to do it but it was the only thing to do in order to protect people during the recession."

The Chancellor pushed his rebellion against the current party line on Europe even further - taking on the Prime Minister himself - when he said that all European finance



Uncertain outlook: Although many voters have made up their minds, the 'don't knows' and undecideds hold the key to the election on 1 May

Photograph: John Lawrence

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ministers were against Brussels control over domestic tax and spending policies as part of the European single currency package. "No one has even suggested that," he said.

Yet that is the spectre that has been raised by Mr Major, and a host of Euro-sceptic Tory candidates and ministers.

Mr Major told the *Sunday Telegraph*: "I agree with the ar-

gument that if you lost control of income tax and spending that you would, for practical purposes, have lost control over sovereignty. So where my backbenchers say that to me, I agree with them."

The gaping Conservative split on Europe is doing untold harm to Mr Major's campaign, and the weekend rows - with Sir Edward Heath openly criticising

the advertisement portraying Mr Blair as Helmut Kohl's dummy - will not come through into the polls until this week.

But Norma Major told the *Mail on Sunday*: "It's sad to see how many people have rocked the boat. When you are out in the market squares, you realise a lot of people think he's doing a great job. And I think the people who are being disloyal to him are betraying the people out there."

Mr Blair told BBC radio's *The World this Weekend*: "I do feel sympathy for him in his present situation, and he is dogged and tenacious in the way he has tried to handle his own political party. But I will say to you bluntly what the problem has been: it has always been a fight for a job, not a fight for a vision."

Even the post pessimistic opinion polling for Labour puts the party on a majority of more than 100.

A survey of recent by-election results, carried out for the *Sunday Times*, shows Labour with 44 per cent share of the vote, compared with 31 per cent for the Tories and 20 per cent for the Liberal Democrats. That result, much closer than the average of the weekend opinion polls, giving Labour a 16 percentage point lead, would give Mr Blair a majority of about 125 seats in the new parliament.

But one senior Conservative told *The Independent* last night he did not believe Labour was that far ahead. "We must keep playing to win," he said. "It's not over until the polling booths shut."

Truth the Tories have to accept



The obvious truth can be avoided no longer: if the Conservatives win this election, they cannot form a successful government. They should therefore be kept out at least until they can. That isn't a statement of party-political bias: it is the only logical conclusion that can be drawn from the past few days of election campaigning.

Any government that wants to lead Britain has to have a sense of our place in the world. In our times, that means above all having a clear and plausible approach to Europe. There is a case for getting out, articulated by the UK Independence Party. There is, we believe, a much better case for staying in and working with allies to democratise and set limits to a union of states.

The Tories, it seems, can deliver neither. Any pretence that they could involve us in a single currency or engage in any alternative positive EU project however minor has been slowly and pub-

licly shredded. John Major's personal position is wholly reasonable. But a dominant part of his party rejects the policy, in many cases openly. It is driving towards a complete rejection of cardinal aspects of the Treaty of Rome and its successor treaties: the logical end of this would be withdrawal and renegotiation.

Let us try to imagine a post-May 1 Tory government in action. Half of its backbenchers would be actively enthu-

siastic about, or complicit in, the anti-Brussels project headed by John Redwood. He is regarded as a deadly enemy by Major, yet he will control a swathe of new Tory MPs. There is a party within a party in the making here.

Others also are sniping and manoeuvring in a battle for the Tory succession. Michael Portillo has been making hand signals to his people. Kenneth Clarke has made it clear enough that he was appalled by the xenophobic poster of Helmut Kohl dandling Tony Blair on his knee. Michael Heseltine's once vaunted pro-Europeanism is exposed by the depressing news that he was the "only better" of that poster.

This may be enjoyable electioneering but it cannot lead to a plausible administration: how would they deal with their European counterparts in June? Would they simply shrug, smile with embarrassment and suggest that it should be business as usual?

No, it cannot be done. The Conservatives would be a government stunned by victory and shattered at the top. Many of its supporters would have given up on European integration, yet it would be a government which lacked any thought-through, plausible alternative.

This newspaper has no vote, but it seems to us that to choose such a government would be to choose paralysis and impotence.

A party seeking election must demonstrate that on the really big questions it is a party and not merely a poisonous argument. The Conservatives are fond of attacking voting reform because, they say, it would lead to unstable coalition governments. Maybe. But they are today offering Britain a coalition government too wide and unstable for thinking, non-aligned people to support.

The Editor

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news

significant shorts

Essex firefighters step up strikes over spending cuts

Firefighters will stage a second strike today as their bitter dispute over spending cuts was set to escalate into further disruption.

Around 1,000 members of the Fire Brigades Union in Essex will walk out for four hours from 9am, with military Green Goddesses being used to provide cover. The union is planning a third strike on Wednesday and is set to name further dates despite a warning from the county council that firefighters will be suspended if that happens.

The FBU was further incensed when firefighters were told they would not be paid for their shift yesterday if they had been on strike. Firefighters who were on strike for one hour from the start of their shift at 9am worked the rest of the day without being paid.

The FBU accused the council of inflaming the dispute over £1.5m spending cuts which, it has warned, will cut jobs.

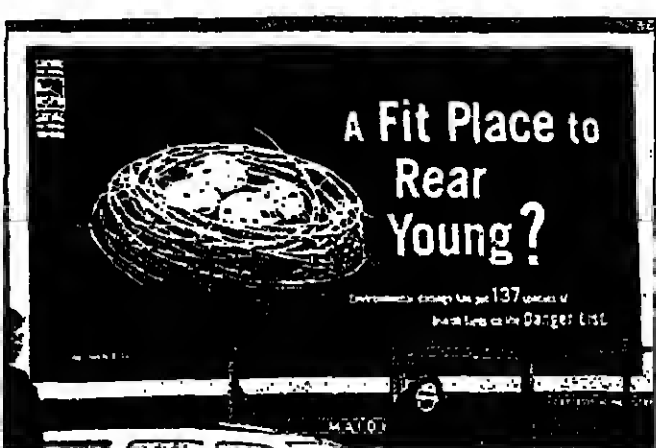
Small beer for the real ale buffs

A new drought brought misery to Devon yesterday but for once the blame did not fall on global warming or South West Water.

The culprits were 4,000 guzzling real ale buffs who were so enthusiastic in their appreciation of the 126 beers on offer at a beer festival that they drank the place dry. Organisers were devastated as they had to call the event off a day early after the beer-drinkers quaffed more than 14,000 pints in 48 hours.

Many more ale connoisseurs had been hoping to enjoy the final day of the festival but had to be turned away because all 200 casks had been sipped. Joanna Webber, one of the organisers of the event, staged at Tucker's Maltings brewery in Newton Abbot, Devon, said more beer would be on offer next year. Ian Burrell

RSPB hops out of the birdbox



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds wants to dump its "woolly-puller, sandalled idealists" image and relaunch itself as a campaigning environmentalist organisation in a series of new poster advertisements.

The RSPB wants to ditch its image as a bird-watchers club and harness the power of its 967,000 members. The size of its membership makes the RSPB a bigger conservation charity than Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.

"Anything called the RSPB people automatically put in a birdbox," said Barbara Young, the organisation's chief executive. "Our role has always been much wider and has involved protecting a whole range of environments that take in water, transport and countryside policy." Paul McCann

Queen's Award for 134 firms

Companies responsible for Dr Martens boots, for selling quality chocolates to Belgium and for developing a machine that counts bank notes and coins by weighing them are among the 134 being honoured with Queen's Awards for Export, Technological and Environmental Achievement today.

The list - published to mark the Queen's birthday - includes 110 awards, for export, 16 for technological and eight for environmental achievement. Several companies - including the business that developed the Tellerate bank note weigher, Gwent-based Perrell Group and and European Gas Turbines won awards in more than one category. There were more than 1,700 applications for this year's awards. Special report, pages 22-23

Self admits taking drugs on PM's jet

Will Self, the cult author and self-confessed former drug addict, has admitted taking heroin in the lavatory of the Prime Minister's election campaign plane. In an interview in *The Independent* on Sunday, he said: "So I was smacked-out on the Prime Minister's jet, big deal. I'd recently been under stress for personal reasons and had fallen into a trough of using heroin again. Questioned about his denials of the allegations, he said: "I'm not Neil Hamilton, I'm a hack hired because I do drugs. I was happy to deny it." Simon Reeve

Two winners share £9.5m jackpot

Two winners shared Saturday night's £9.5m National Lottery jackpot. The lucky numbers were 32, 37, 14, 1, 16 and 25, with the bonus number being 11.

THE INDEPENDENT ABROAD

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people



Agassi and Shields: Low-key wedding for Hollywood couple (Photograph: Albert Fournier)

Paparazzi high and dry as Brooke and Andre marry

Brooke Shields, the actress once known as the Lolita of the big screen, donned a wedding dress with a 5ft train to marry Andre Agassi, the tennis star, in an evening ceremony in California on Saturday. While four helicopters filled with paparazzi hovered outside, a string ensemble and the San Francisco Boys Choir performed at the ceremony.

Only around 100 guests attended the wedding at St John's Episcopal Chapel, in the coastal city of Monterey. The couple exchanged vows at 6:45 pm, in front of the Reverend Charles Gard, pastor of Holy Family Catholic Church in Glendale and a Shields family friend.

The reception was held at the exclusive Stonepine Resort in Carmel Valley in Monterey, which is 115 miles south of San Francisco.

"Both are the nicest unassuming kind of people," said one of the wedding guests. "They were very simple, straightforward and kind."

Shields, 31, is currently enjoying being the star of the television comedy *Suddenly Susan*. The series has been hugely successful and has resurrected a career which had suffered from a string of flops.

A model since she appeared in *Private Dancer* in 1986, Shields has since starred in *When Harry Met Sally...* and *My Sister Sam*. She also won the Golden Globe award for Best Actress in 1993.

The couple were introduced by a mutual friend in 1993 and kept in touch by fax and by e-mail.

But three months ago Agassi, aged 22,000, publicly declared his devotion to Shields, with a full-page advertisement in the programme of the Golden Globe TV and movie awards.

Yesterday the couple were again looking for privacy, by keeping the ceremony as low-key as possible. Telephone messages left at Agassi Enterprises in Las Vegas and with representatives for Shields were not returned. Ian Burrell

Timothy Leary's final trip - boldly going into orbit

Timothy Leary (right), the LSD guru who died last year, is to take another trip: his ashes will be blasted into space aboard a rocket due to lift off from the Canary Islands today. About 7 grams of the author's ashes will be joined by those of 23 others who in life wanted their mortal remains to circle the earth in a cylinder the size of a tin of baked beans.



The trip was organised by a Dallas-based company, Celestis Inc., which sold reservations on the Pegasus rocket for \$4,800 a piece. Leary's co-travellers include Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry and a five-year-old New York boy who loved space. Their ashes will orbit the earth for six years, before re-entering the atmosphere to burn up again.

The rocket's purpose is not solely to grant these bizarre last wishes. Its primary mission is to launch Spain's first satellite. Celestis, a company dedicated to promoting "positive projects on Earth and in outer space", has set up a foundation whose only service is to arrange for this and future extra-terrestrial funerals.

"Space remains the domain of a few, the dream of many," said the company's president, Charles Chafer, in a statement. "The dream can finally be realised."

For Leary, who first found fame, as a Harvard University lecturer, in the 1960s by promoting the use of hallucinogenic drugs like LSD, with exhortations to "tune in, turn on and drop out", the space expedition is his final stunt.

Before his death from prostate cancer last May, he said he would tune out permanently, possibly by committing suicide in cyberspace. This was not to be. But he may yet find a fitting resting place in space itself. Edward Helmore, New York

Mother's horror at her rapist son

Angelina Mavrides, the mother of one of a teenage gang convicted of the violent rape of an Austrian tourist in London yesterday spoke about how she told police that her son, Nicholas, now serving 10 years in prison, had been involved in the attack.

Despite death threats, she acted as a key police witness, identifying the other gang members involved in the rape of the woman in King's Cross, last September.

Ms Mavrides, of Camden Town, told the *News of the World* that Nicholas, 16, told her about the rape the morning after.

She described how she cried, banged her head against the wall and was physically sick after seeing the story on television. Feeling close to a nervous breakdown, she talked to her social worker and then phoned the police. "They took Nicky away," she said. "I felt a weight had been lifted off my shoulders, like a whole load of mess had been wiped clean."

"I wanted to harm myself. I felt hurt and angry. I know what rape is. I know what it means."

Nicholas and the seven other gang members, aged 14 to 17, were sentenced to a total of 77 years of detention last week. Joanna Snicker

briefing

SOCIETY

Black nurses and midwives deserting NHS in droves

The number of black nurses and midwives joining the NHS is falling dramatically, according to government figures. Despite countless equal opportunities programmes, the proportion of nursing, midwifery and health visitor staff who are black is 8.7 per cent among over-55s but only 0.8 per cent among under-25s.

Roger Kline, national secretary of the Manufacturing Science and Finance union (MSF), said anecdotal evidence suggested older staff were warning their children against working for the service after suffering harassment and discrimination in their own careers.

The data confirmed the everyday experience of black employees, he added, and showed there had been a degree of complacency in tackling racism. "There have been dozens of major reports, research papers, policy initiatives and ministerial statements in recent years all deploring the scale of racism in the NHS. Yet most of this is now revealed as being as useful as the band playing their hearts out on the decks of the Titanic."

The figures come from the Department of Health's annual non-medical workforce census. Louise Jury

CLIMATE

Britain will bake - then freeze

Britons can look forward to increasingly warmer weather for the next 50 years. But the Earth is likely to cool over the next 10,000 years, and in the long term Britain may have to contend with a another ice age, say experts at the University of East Anglia in Norwich.

The predictions come in a new book on British weather which commemorates 25 years of the university's Climatic Research Unit. Editors Mike Hulme and Elaine Barrow say they have attempted to record the changing British climate from before the last Ice Age.

The British climate is getting warmer and the last 50 years represent the warmest period since records began, it says.

Climates of the British Isles: Past, Present and Future, edited by Mike Hulme and Elaine Barrow, published by Routledge, £65 hardback, £18 paperback.



HEALTH

Menstrual drug ineffective

Increasing numbers of women are having hysterectomies because the most common drug prescribed for menstrual problems does not work, an expert reports. Women are paying a heavy price by undergoing a surgical procedure that they do not need, said Stephen Smith, professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Rosie Maternity Hospital, Cambridge.

More than 75,000 hysterectomies were carried out on women in England in 1992-93 and figures show that the number is rising. The operation is one of the most common, second only to Caesarians. On current rates at least one in five women will have their wombs removed before the age of 65.

More than 350,000 women were prescribed drugs to control heavy periods - the chief reason for hysterectomy - in 1993 but four out of 10 received the hormone progestogen which has a minimal effect reducing blood loss by up to 20 per cent and in some cases increasing bleeding. Other drugs such as mefenamic acid and tranexamic acid reduce blood loss by up to 60 per cent.

Almost a third of women of childbearing age suffer heavy periods but GPs may be inadvertently encouraging them to undergo surgery by prescribing ineffective treatments. A survey of 200 GPs, conducted for the Task Force to Improve the Management of Menorrhagia, found that 70 per cent said they would consider using progestogen. Jeremy Laurance

TRAVEL

India - the jewel in the brochure

Holidaymakers are heading for an Indian summer, with bookings to the subcontinent soaring, according to tour companies. Inspirations has seen India bookings for next winter rise 33 per cent, with the west coast resort of Goa doing particularly well.

And holiday company Unijet is doubling its Goa capacity in its winter 1997-98 brochures, which go on sale next Wednesday. Inspirations marketing director Francis Torilla said: "The response to Indian holidays has been incredible, especially to Goa."

Unijet has decided to expand its India programme because of the demand. For the first time, the company is bringing out a standalone India and Sri Lanka brochure. The company's prices to Goa start at £399 for seven nights, while Inspirations' Indian prices begin at £405 for seven nights in Kerala.

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Gowrie plans a lottery subsidy for opera

David Lister
Arts News Editor

The chairman of the Arts Council, Lord Gowrie, yesterday said that lottery money would soon go towards reducing ticket prices at venues including the Royal Opera House.

His remarks came after he controversially condemned the mid Royal Opera House regime under Sir Jeremy Isaacs. He described their closure plans as a "shambles".

Lord Gowrie told *The Independent* that he was "obsessive" about accessibility for opera and ballet, and said that a new lottery scheme, Arts for Everyone, being operated by the Arts Council, would be available to give money earmarked for reducing seat prices.

Asked if the Royal Opera House, which has already had £78m lottery money towards its rebuilding plans, could apply for yet more lottery money to reduce seat prices, Lord Gowrie

replied: "Not at the moment, but in time, yes."

Lord Gowrie also revealed that he had held back a tranche of the £78m because he was worried about what he termed the "chaos" of the closure plans being supervised by General Director Sir Jeremy Isaacs, and Chairman Sir Angus Stirling.

He only released the last £23m when he was confident alternative arrangements had been made for housing the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet.

The last tranche of money was not released until it was announced that Sir Jeremy and Sir Angus were retiring to be replaced by Genista McIntosh and Lord Chaddington respectively.

Lord Gowrie said yesterday he had confidence in the new team, but would have preferred it if their closure plans, announced earlier this month, had provided one stable base for the companies. Instead, they will visit a number of London venues.

But Lord Gowrie was

scathing about the way Sir Jeremy and Sir Angus had allowed the two-year closure to draw near without a new base to house the companies. Sir Jeremy had wanted the companies to move into a new theatre at Tower Bridge, but this plan fell through.

In a letter to the *Sunday Times*, Lord Gowrie wrote: "The Board, under the chairmanship of Sir Angus Stirling, and with Sir Jeremy Isaacs as General Director, was given

frequent warnings of the need for fall-back positions from their visionary, but highly uncertain, preferred option at Tower Bridge. They were warned by officers of the council, by those members of the council whose responsibilities directly touched upon the issue and by me personally...

the closure plans were, quite frankly, a shambles." Yesterday Lord Gowrie added: "I am very bullish now. We would certainly not have

given the extra tranche of money if we weren't confident about what will now be achieved. Opera and ballet companies will be moving around and winning new audiences, but the plans are less good than they could have been. I think you get a more stable audience with a single venue."

The Royal Opera House suffered another set-back last week when a new chief executive of the Balanchine Trust in New York refused to stage the

Royal Ballet to stage the Balanchine ballet *Apollo* without the right to have prior casting approval. The Royal Ballet have cancelled their plan to stage the piece which would have starred Darcy Bussell.

But Royal Ballet officials angrily denied a report in the *Sunday Times* that it was losing one of its stars, Viviana Durante. In fact, Miss Durante, who has been on a sabbatical, will be dancing lead roles in several productions next season.

Women are scientific achievers – but men still lead degree league tables

Judith Judd
Education Editor

The mystery of women's failure to achieve as many first class degrees as men has taken a new turn. Research from Oxford University suggests that women who want to maximise their chances of a first should head for science rather than arts subjects.

Or should they? As thousands of women prepare to sit their finals, the research shows no easy explanation as to why do not get their fair share of top degrees.

According to the study of degree results at Oxford, a higher percentage of women than men achieve firsts in engineering, economics and management (one subject) and in biochemistry they almost match them. But in history they are trailing, with just 9.5 per cent of women achieving firsts compared with 18.6 per cent of men. In philosophy, politics and economics the percentage of men obtaining firsts is more than twice that of women.

The study by Dr Margaret Spear of the university's education department has compiled a league table with the subjects in which women do best in terms of firsts. This shows that 53 per cent of the subjects in the top half of the table are

scientific compared with 35 per cent of subjects in the bottom half.

Her work, which is funded by the university, looks at the percentage of firsts achieved by men and women for all subjects between 1992 and 1996.

Dr Spear said the results were encouraging for women. "There are subjects where women are doing as well as men."

In 1995, 20.8 per cent of men obtained firsts at Oxford compared with only 13.5 per cent of women. Nationally, the figures are 9 per cent for men and 6.9 per cent for women.

Dr Spear says that, though the difference is greater at Oxford, the same factors are almost certainly at work in other universities at a time when girls have forged ahead at GCSE and drawn level with boys at A-level.

But how do you explain, for instance, why women match men's performance in biochemistry but not in chemistry? And why is there a bigger gender gap in biological sciences than physiological sciences? Why has the gap in history been declining steadily over the last four years?

Dr Spear has applied for a three-year research grant to examine some of the hypotheses on the gender gap in



No explanation: In the classroom girls may be forging ahead of boys at GCSEs, but fewer women than men achieve first class university passes

Photograph: Bill Rowntree

degree performance.

A study carried out by Cambridge University's history faculty suggests the tutorial system in which two or three students discuss a topic with a don may be to blame. Tutorials, the Cambridge study suggests, are adversarial rituals in which aggressive males bluff their way to dominance while cautious women fade into the background.

Since courses have different teaching styles – science students have more practicals and lectures while arts students have more tutorials – that may provide part of the explanation

for the variations in the gender gap between subjects.

Alternatively, the proportion of extremely bright women may be higher in science than in arts.

Any study, says Dr Spear, would also need to look at how students are assessed and examined. A more structured type of exam such as that often used in science may suit women better than open-ended essay questions.

Fiona Campbell, the university's equal opportunities officer, says the issue encourages academics to consider what they mean by a first-class

degree: "It may be that both male and female academics have a similar perception of what constitutes a first class undergraduate."

Dr Spear is convinced that there is no single reason for

women's degree results. She also wants to investigate theories that they are held back by anxiety and a lack of self-confidence and that they are victims of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The university has just asked

Dr Spear to carry out another short-term project reviewing all the research on the gender gap in degree performance and comparing men and women's final degree results with their qualifications on arrival.

Ms. Campbell says it is unusual for a university to commission research into itself. "But if Dr Spear produces results which provide explanations then the university will want to act."

He who dares wins full marks for showing off in exams

Nicole Veash

Some leading British female academics told *The Independent* yesterday that male students are rewarded for showing off, while women tend to play safe when it comes to passing exams.

The novelist Antonia Byatt, who got a first from Cambridge, lectured at University College London for 11 years.

"Those women who do get firsts have the same qualities as men. They are brilliant and daring," she said.

"The problem is that most female students I taught tended to fall into a timid hedge in the middle. They are more anxious about getting a decent 2:1 and they are not terribly ambitious."

"Men are prone to showing off. Those who get thirds are showing off a different, although, still interesting way, when compared to those who get firsts. Unlike women, men tend not to play safe."

Germaine Greer, feminist and lecturer in English at Cam-



Byatt: 'Unlike women, men tend not to play safe'



Jardine: Three-hour exams are more suited to men



Green: 'Women who get firsts tend to be fragile'

bridge University, said: "Men do seem to get higher marks but I don't think that matters."

"Women who get Seconds are a great pleasure to teach and often have more adaptable characteristics which employers want. Those who get Firsts tend to be fragile and only fit for a life of academe."

Lisa Jardine, critic and lecturer in English at Queen Mary and Westfield College, Univer-

sity of London, believes modern degree courses do away with academic discrimination. She said: "There is no difference in the perceptions between the genders when it comes to discussing the subject in hand. The problem is the methods of exam."

"A three-hour examination tests temperament and characteristics that are naturally stronger in men. This type of

testing has no relevance to the modern world."

"With continuous assessment you can see whether a student really understands the subject rather than just rewarding the short burst of brilliance needed for an exam."

"Men are no longer achieving higher results in the new style degrees. It is *passé* to talk about this, because women are now outstripping men."

Russians in a jam over gems

Mary Dejevsky
Washington

Americans have grown accustomed to rescuing stranded Russians: circus artists whose contracts have not been honoured, sailors whose ships are impounded for non-payment of port fees, and much more of the same. But Washington has for the past few days been playing reluctant host to a particularly remarkable collection of the marooned: a pile of jewels that belonged to the family of Russia's last tsar, the Romanovs.

A giant American lorry is parked outside one of Washington's premier galleries – wedged between two saloon cars with diplomatic plates. The cars belong to Russian diplomats, one of whom – first secretary Mikhail Maslov – has been camping there with the express purpose of keeping the lorry immobilised.

The reason for the diplomatic traffic jam is a dispute between the Russian organisers of the Romanov exhibition (private businessmen, who want the jewels to continue their tour to Houston and San Diego), and the Russian au-

thorities, who want the jewels returned home instantly. Officially, the Russians want the jewels' back to exhibit during celebrations for the 850th anniversary of the city of Moscow. Unofficially, it is said, they think that security for the jewels is inadequate and fear that the Russian organisers may pocket the proceeds.

The touring exhibition, "Jewels of the Romanovs: treasures of the Russian imperial court", was organised at the Washington end by a group which describes itself as independent and "dedicated to the enhancement

of US-Russian cultural relations". The exhibition appeared to have official Russian blessing – how else would the priceless Romanov jewels be allowed to leave the country? – but now the authorities in Moscow have apparently changed their mind. Whether it is because they now want a slice of the exhibition's unexpected success (and proceeds) or because they have reassessed the risks, no one is saying.

Whatever the reason, the battle over the immediate future of Russia's most prized jewels now appears to rest in the hands of the US State Department.

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Five die in smash after police chase

Kathy Marks

Detectives investigating the death of five men in a stolen car which was being chased by police said last night the accident was "the worst most of us have ever seen".

The men were all in a Ford Orion which overturned and split in two after crashing into a tree in Crumpeall, Greater Manchester, at about 12.30am. Witnesses described scenes of carnage in the road.

Chief Superintendent Peter Harris, head of the investigation into the incident, said it was "probably the worst accident most of us have ever seen". Two police officers who were first at the crash site were "badly shaken" and required counselling afterwards, he said.

The Orion had been reported stolen earlier in the evening from the Salford area. It was spotted in Crumpeall by police in a Vauxhall Astra van on a routine night patrol, which followed it for a short distance before signalling for the driver to stop.

The car first slowed down as if to pull over, but then executed a rapid U-turn and sped off in the opposite direction, jumping two sets of red lights, police said. The van continued the pursuit, and came across the crash scene further along the road, by a bus shelter.

An inquiry was launched yesterday by the police accident investigation unit and an independent police inspector. However, Chief Supt Harris said the officers had slowed down at each set of traffic lights during the chase and were 150 yards behind when the car hit the tree.

He added: "At this stage there is no suggestion that the officers involved were in any way to blame for the incident."

Under guidelines issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers in 1989 following a spate of serious accidents involving police vehicles, officers involved in pursuits are required to drive within safe limits and to regard public safety as paramount. The identities of the five men, be-

lieved to be in their late teens to early twenties, were withheld yesterday while their families were contacted.

Police said the driver of the Orion had apparently lost control and collided with the tree, possibly while trying to avoid a Toyota van that pulled out from a side street moments beforehand. They appealed for the driver of the dark-coloured van to contact them.

Witnesses said the Orion appeared to have been crushed in the accident. Derek Morgan, a care assistant at a nearby residential home, said: "There were two bodies that had been thrown clear of the car, one on the road and one lying on the pavement."

"The car was totally mangled. There was blood everywhere. It was just horrific."

Andrew Lord, who saw the wreckage while on his way home from a wedding, said the car was on its roof in the road.

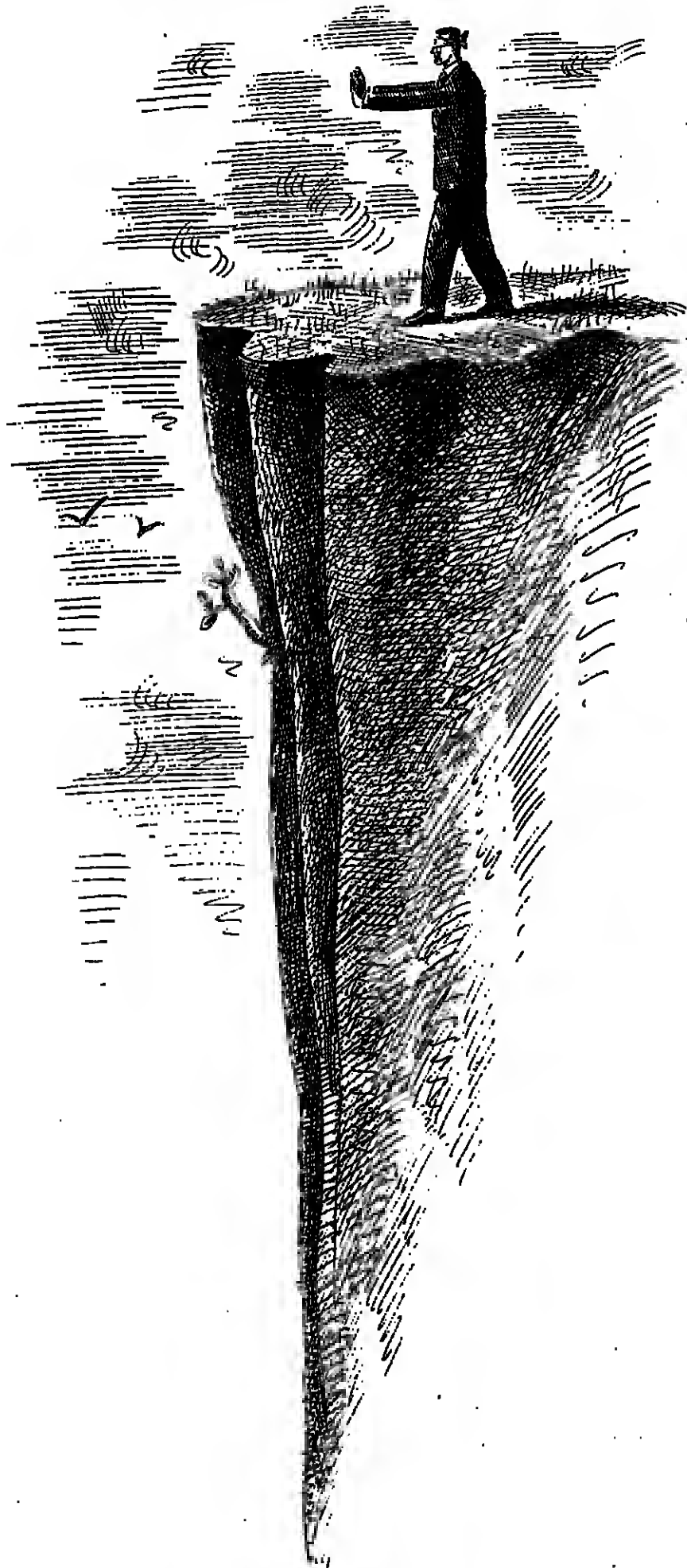
Police described the crash as "a tragedy" and extended their sympathies to the families of the dead men.



Road carnage: The wreckage of the car in which five young men died yesterday while trying to escape police

Photograph: Reuters

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Final act in Bridgewater saga begins

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

The men jailed in 1979 for the murder of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater finally get their day in court today when a hearing of extensive new evidence begins at the Court of Appeal.

The appeal, expected to last up to four weeks, is the last leg of an 18-year campaign to get the convictions of cousins Vincent and Michael Hickey, James Robinson and the late Patrick Molloy overturned.

In a sensational turn of events in February, the Court of Appeal freed the Hickeys and Mr Robinson on unconditional bail after an independent forensic test, completed just a fortnight earlier, revealed that police had concocted a statement used to provoke Mr Molloy into making a false confession.

While the final appeal hearing will involve less drama, lawyers for the men plan to expose each and every failure that contributed to the miscarriage of justice. Evidence relating to

around 80 further grounds of appeal will be presented, covering the men's alibis, the unreliability of prosecution witnesses and non-disclosure of forensic evidence.

Jim Nichol, their solicitor, said: "If the evidence we have today had been heard at the original trial these men would never have gone to prison. The failure to disclose relevant material... has helped to keep them behind bars. Much of what we now have was available at the time of the trial."

Ann Whelan, mother of Michael Hickey and a key figure in the campaign to prove the men's innocence, said: "We have waited for this day for nearly 19 years and it is my fervent hope that when the men are finally shown to be innocent, the establishment will have the courage to say 'sorry'."

"Not only have the men been badly let down by the system, but the Bridgewater family, who suffered a terrible loss, are now faced with the knowledge that the real killer has never been brought to justice."

DAILY POEM

April, Stratford-upon-Avon

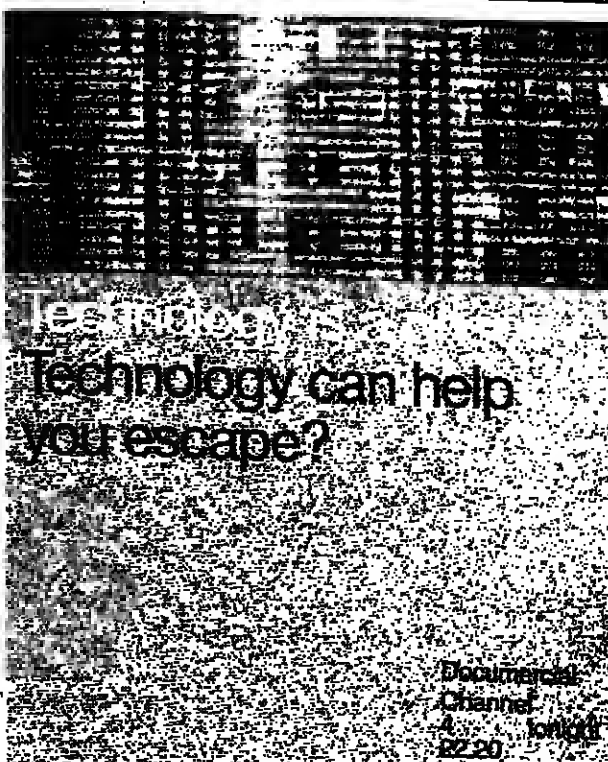
By Zanna Beswick

First foot-ferry of the year
he says,
cranking chain in the flat hull;
heaves his passenger
across this small rubicon
of north bank
to civic south.

The river splits
the frost in spring
exuberance

Last dark twigs
hang back over the water.
Perhaps they hide
from this sharp imperative,
the cracking apart
of fly-paper buds,
the unstoppable opening of hands.

This week's poems come from *Earth Ascending: an anthology of living poetry*, edited by Jay Ramsay as part of the Sacred Land Project (Stride, £9.50). Sacred Land aims to restore the visibility and accessibility of Britain's thousands of sacred sites, whether medieval abbeys or prehistoric figures. Sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature, the project marks its English launch this Wednesday with a ceremony involving the Archbishop of Canterbury at St Mary's Church in Willesden, north-west London. The church stands on a pre-Christian sacred site, and its "holy well" was a place of pilgrimage until the Reformation.



Technology can help you escape?

Documentary Channel
22:20

Scots woo
palates with
taste of sea

Clergy
abused
wives
speak o

Arsonist tary
four church

من الأصل

Scots woo foreign palates with sweet taste of sea urchin

"Initially the taste is wonderfully sweet, then there's a long aftertaste which someone once compared to hazelnuts with a hint of iodine," says marine biologist Dr Maeve Kelly, writes Nicholas Schoon. "But I can only describe it as sea urchin."

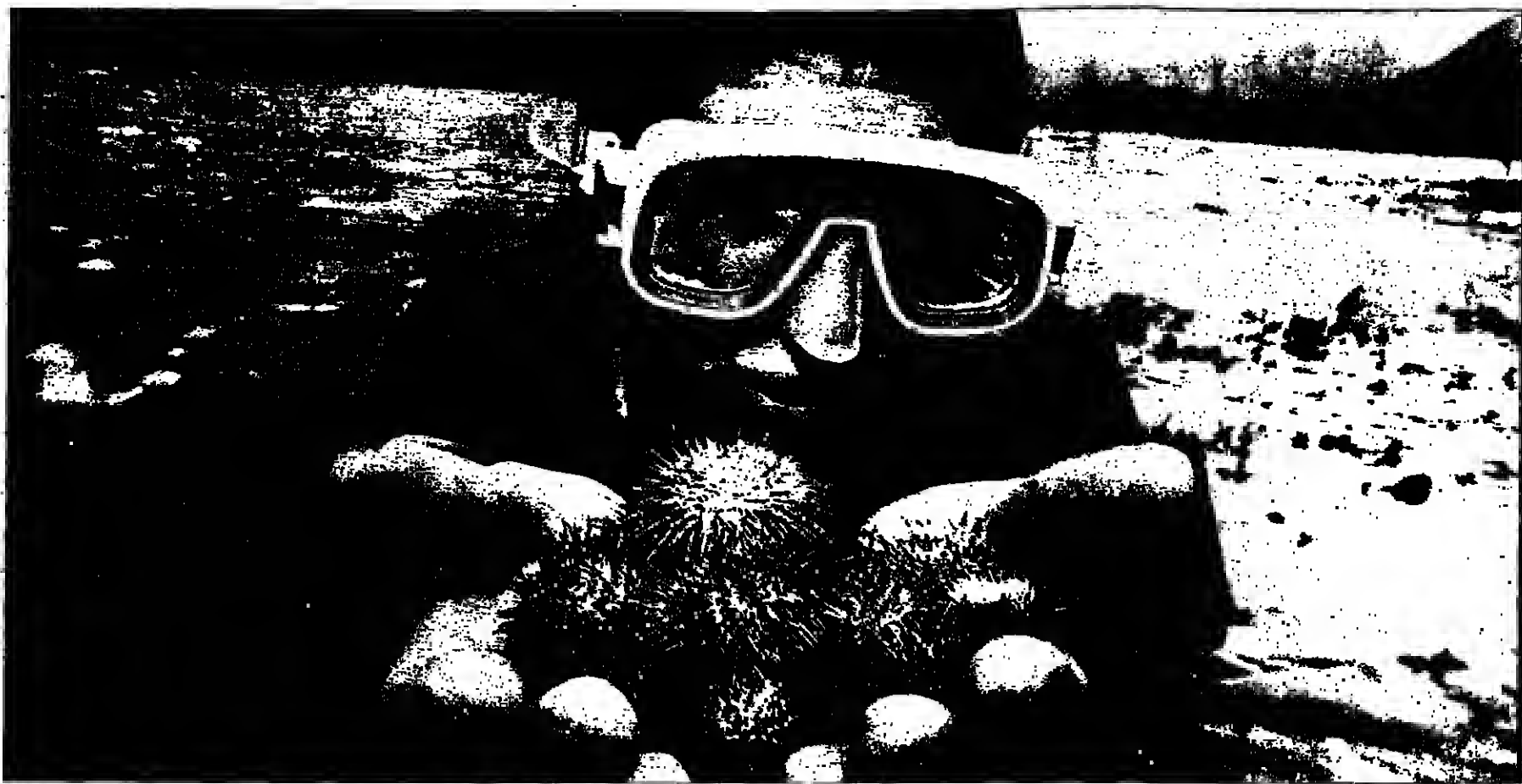
Dr Kelly is heading a Scottish research project into the prospects for ranching the dark, spherical and spiny sea urchins in the waters around Britain. The bit that is eaten is the swollen gonads - eggs and sperm - inside the exterior skeleton.

The £320,000 project, funded by fish farming firms and the Government's Natural Environment Research Council, reaches an important early milestone in the next fortnight when the first batches of UK-reared urchins are exported to France, where buyers will do taste tests.

About 100,000 tons of the sea creatures are eaten each year, mainly in Japan and France. It is a trade worth some £500m a year. The programme began after a Scottish salmon farmer found thousands of sea urchins grow-

Recipe for success

in Loch Creran, near Oban. The urchins are reared in a special cage inside a salmon cage when it was brought ashore. The species, *Psammechinus miliaris*, is smaller than those normally consumed and grows all round the British Isles. Dr Kelly is now concentrating on getting the right colour - bright orange, and with a "creamy but firm" texture.



Restaurant delicacy: A diver showing his collection of sea urchins, found in Loch Creran, near Oban

Photograph: Tom Kidd

Clergy's abused wives speak out

Clare Garner

Wives of abusive clergymen have broken their silence to speak out about the mental, physical and sexual torture they have suffered at the hands of their husbands.

Domestic violence in the church has been unacknowledged by Dr Lesley Macdonald, research project co-ordinator at Edinburgh University's Department of Divinity, who has completed a two-year study into Christianity and violence.

Dr Macdonald, who is herself married to a clergyman, studied cases involving abuse within church marriages, as well as clergy abuse of women who had sought church advice in a professional counselling context.

Of the 23 abused women she interviewed, seven were formerly married to clergymen. Other clergy wives who had contacted her chose not to participate in the project because they were still living in the abusive relationship.

"The juxtaposition between the person who has a plausible, well-liked, public persona and hearing about what happens in their private life is shocking," said Dr Macdonald. "But it's just an indication that violence against women is everywhere. This is something that happens in all sectors of society - professional people and church people are not exempt."

There is "perhaps more opportunity" for clergymen to abuse their power and authority because of the church's patriarchal tradition, believes Dr Macdonald. "There are some people within the church who use scriptural texts and theo-

logical traditions to justify or legitimise the violence," she said.

"There are scriptural texts which say wives should submit to their husbands and there's a strong theological tradition that women are responsible for bringing sin into the world. Their [women's] role in life is essentially one of service or sacrifice. All of those can provide some of the conditions in which it's possible for violence and abuse to occur."

Some of Dr Macdonald's interviewees will describe their ordeal tonight on BBC 1's *Here and Now* programme. One Scottish woman, now divorced from her minister husband, tells the programme: "I really thought he was going to do a mastectomy one night and I got very, very deep scratches on my breast. He was his usual very professional person preaching in church Sunday after Sunday, it was almost like a Jekyll and Hyde situation." Two actresses also tell the story of a woman who was raped by her minister husband.

The programme stresses that there is little independent counselling and help available from the church for the victims of domestic violence.

A spokesman for the Catholic Church said yesterday: "People have to remember that the church is made up of human beings. While it strives for perfection, it nevertheless incorporates the faults of humans such as domestic violence. Inevitably this problem does not escape the church."

The Rev John Chalmers, of the Church of Scotland's Department of Ministry, said he was shocked by the study's findings.

Arsonist targets four churches

Simon Reeve

An arsonist with a grudge is thought to be responsible for fires which severely damaged four isolated churches in Devon within an hour of each other on Saturday night and early yesterday morning.

Detectives confirmed yesterday that there have been eight

arson attacks on churches in the area within the last month, one of which took place on Friday night. The fires are thought to be the work of the same person and have caused approximately £50,000 worth of damage.

In each case fires have been lit on the church altars. "I have never known anything like this to the extent that a particular part of the church had been targeted," said Detective Sergeant Geoff Hawes, who is investigating the attacks.

The latest spate of fires started at St Nicholas' Church in Dunksell, near Honiton, at 11pm on Saturday. An intruder broke in through a locked window to start a fire which caused serious damage and ruined two 200-year-old zinc tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

Within 40 minutes another fire had started in the same village in Wolfold chapel. Twenty minutes later a third fire started in St Mary's church in the nearby village of Luppitt. Another fire was also started at St James' church in the village of Sheldon.

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News Release

21 April 1997

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election '97

Message from *The Independent's* survey of six important constituencies is that a Tories close gap on Labour

REDDITCH: 44th on Labour's target list. A win here would make Labour the largest party in a hung Parliament

Unhappy Conservative supporters who were planning to vote for new Labour are heading back to the Tory fold, according to *The Independent's* focus group in this key marginal. Their reasons are based on disappointment with the low-key Blair election campaign and the way his party has appeared to change policy under fire.

The views of the group – all Tory voters five years ago – have been closely monitored since last November and until last week none had significantly changed their views on which way to vote. Now half of those who formerly told *The Independent* they were certain or likely to switch to Labour have had second thoughts. One voter, who had previously visited the Tory leadership, admitted that John Major was at least "facing the issues" while Labour avoided hard questions.

Their changing views have coincided with a growing concern over Europe following the publicity given to the Tories' divisions on the subject and Mr Major's responses. However, though the general tone of remarks is Euro-sceptical, there is confusion over the implications of the single currency, together with worry about Britain being left behind by other European countries.

This small glimmer of hope for the Conservatives is echoed by their candidate in Redditch, Anthea McIntyre, who seems genuinely optimistic about the party's chances in the new seat,



Redditch Tories are returning to the fold. Photograph: Brian Harris

in which Labour needs a swing of just over 3 per cent to win. She believes there could be a double squeeze on Labour, with many of those now "undecided" voting Conservative, and a number of disgruntled old Labour supporters abstaining.

Ms McIntyre, a business consultant, said: "I honestly do feel we do have a chance. I think some traditional Labour voters are going to stay at home – that's what they are telling me."

If Labour fails to take seats such as Redditch it will effectively mean the end of its hopes of forming the next government. Its candidate is lecturer Jacqui Smith, who like Ms McIntyre is highly regarded in her party's hierarchy.

Pausing briefly in her high-octane campaign, Ms Smith says she is "quietly optimistic" about her party's chances. "We have had a phoney war for too long and at last we're into the real

campaign," she said. Canvassers had found a lot of undecided, unhappy Tories, a lot of whom she believed would end up switching to Labour, a process she was confident would continue despite recent reservations expressed to us about Mr Blair and his party. "We are getting a lot of support and we're certainly very optimistic. But we know we have to get people out and earn their trust."

However, though among *The Independent's* group there are those who say they will still switch to Labour, a worrying fact for the party is the apparent softness of such support. A number say they probably prefer the "honesty" of Paddy Ashdown and the Liberal Democrats, though feel it is a wasted vote. One or two others show signs of wobbling, as Ms Smith confessed, they are taking nothing for granted.

Michael Streeter



Steven Marriott, 28, Radio frequency engineer. The former Conservative voter was preparing to vote Labour but is having second thoughts.

"I'm having doubts about Tony Blair. I just do not trust him. He seems to say one thing, but I reckon he will do the opposite."

"I thought Labour would have a good campaign, but they are being very vague and not saying much about their policies."

"My main concerns are jobs and retraining and the parties not lying on taxation. I now think I will vote Conservative again unless Labour pull their socks up and are more detailed on what they will do."



Andrew Osciak, 45, Toolmaker. A former Tory voter who had decided to switch to Labour before the campaign began.

"But now I'm not sure again. It's just the way they are behaving, like Blair over Scotland and privatisation. They seem to keep changing their policies, reverting to Tory policies."

"I'm not convinced either by the Conservatives and I'm a bit mixed up now over what to do."

"Law and order is my main concern and the NHS. The Tories are saying they will improve it, but they said that last time and it is being run down."



Lionel Baird, 52, Paramedic. Was determined to switch to Labour, but after meeting local Labour councillors will probably vote Tory again.

"It was a real eye-opener like going back 20 or 30 years. They were talking about trade union power and buying back the privatised industries."

"I thought new Labour had changed, but the leopard has not changed its spots. It was frightening. To be honest, now I think about it we both have jobs, we have a good life and go on two or three holidays a year."

"On the economy I still trust the Conservatives more. I just don't think Tony Blair is trustworthy, he never answers questions directly."



Susan Lovett, 38, Former sales consultant. Is staying with the Conservatives, though she admires Paddy Ashdown.

"Out of the three, he comes across as more positive, but it's the same old question, people feel that if they voted for the Liberal Democrats it would be a wasted vote and let Labour in."

"It's a shame that the Conservatives are falling apart over Europe. The Labour Party are more bottled up, but I think they are equally split. Europe is a key issue and I think we need to be better informed."

"On the economy I still trust the Conservatives more. I just don't think Tony Blair is trustworthy, he never answers questions directly."



Mark Redfern, 29, Engineer. Had made up his mind to switch to Labour, but he's now wavering.

"I still think I'm going to vote Labour, but I'm not as happy with them as I was. I'm swaying a bit."

"I think the Tories have had a better campaign, though I'm still dissatisfied with them. At least John Major is facing the issues. The Liberal Democrats are probably making more sense than anyone at the moment and say they are going to put it on tax."

"I want to make the right decision, but I'm a bit confused."

TAMWORTH: 69th on Labour's list. Winning the seat would give the party a majority of around 20

When the electoral mood was tested in Tamworth a year ago Labour's Brian Jenkins glided to victory overturning a comfortable Tory majority to win by more than 13,000 votes, in a memorable by-election win.

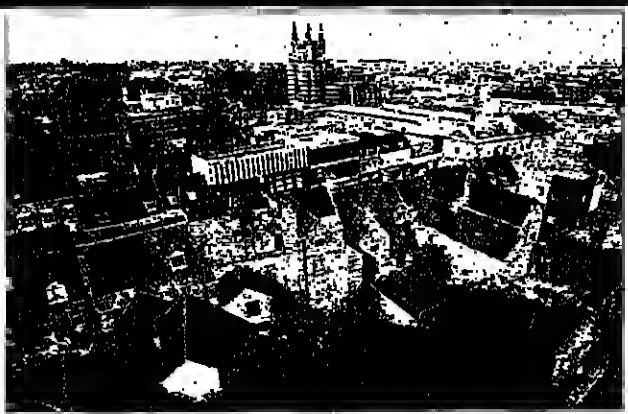
After boundary changes the old South-East Staffordshire seat – now officially called Tamworth – has lost two Conservative-leaning areas, making new Labour's task this time, on paper, even more straightforward.

Such thinking, however, is anathema to its election team which wisely counsels against reading too much into one-off polls. Steve Holland, the campaign co-ordinator, said: "By-elections are notorious for throwing up rogue results. It ain't all over till it's all over."

A victory for the Tories would probably mean a tight Labour majority nationally at best.

Tamworth has acquired the reputation of a barometer seat, in politics, an indicator of where the national mood is heading. Trying her best to capture that mood for the Tories is Lady Ann Lightbown, widow of the former MP and government whip Sir David Lightbown whose death caused last year's by-election.

Lady Ann is upbeat about their chances in what looks like a head-to-head between the two main parties after the Liberal Democrat vote fell away last year. "We are getting a good response on the doorstep," she insisted as she canvassed in the picturesque hamlet of Haunton. But one senior Tory has been



Tamworth, where Labour won a by-election. Photograph: Tom Pison

heard to say privately that they expect to lose, which seems a more realistic assessment. In our survey of voters, we found a number of disaffected Tories determined to vote Labour or not at all – motivated by what they see as broken promises over tax.

Apart from the predominant concerns over health and education Europe appears as a growing issue on the doorstep, more so after the public Tory divisions, but usually among older voters already likely to vote Conservative. The Labour vote looks fairly stable and there are signs that people who have voted Liberal Democrat or abstained in the past may vote Labour this time to bring down the Government.

Yet there is enough evidence among the undecided to suggest the Tories will poll far stronger than last year and may even run Labour hard on 1 May. Labour expects to lose some of last

year's support, while hopefully picking up new votes, and there is a suggestion that the dictum adopted by Bill Clinton's election team in the 1992 presidential election – "It's the economy, stupid" – is reflected among voters. A number of malcontent Tories told us they would ultimately vote for John Major, pointing to the strength of the economy and their rise in prosperity over 18 years.

Mr Jenkins' election team, which has been painstakingly preparing the groundwork on voters for two years, is confident Labour can hold its share of the vote at around 26,000, almost certainly enough to win the seat. But realistically the team expects a smaller majority and insists 1992 is a better comparison. Mr Holland said one of their main tasks was to ensure their supporters turned out in strength and did not just assume a Labour win.

Michael Streeter



Christine Feenan, 25, Part-time receptionist. Former Liberal Democrat voter intending to vote Labour.

"I voted for the Lib-Dems at the last General Election and I like them, but I will vote Labour now to make sure of a change of government."

"The main issues for me are jobs, education and health."

"Tony Blair seems trustworthy, though all politicians lie at some time. I think John Major is indecisive."

"The country needs a change and we have all had enough of this government. I think my husband will vote Labour as well."



Peter Lubrano, 45, Self-employed graphic designer. Will "probably" vote Conservative again though admits he was until recently undecided.

"I have considered the idea of voting Labour but I do not really trust them, it's just too much of a change."

"I do not believe that ultimately they will be allowed to get away with what they say they are going to do."

"I'm going to vote on what's been happening in the country in the last few years and in general I think that we are better off."

"Most people distrust politicians anyway. It's a question of better the devil you know."



Donna Hinson, 35, Runs own business providing care in the community. A former Conservative voter, initially undecided. But like a number when pressed, she said: "To be honest I will probably vote Conservative again in the end."

"I do think the Conservatives have lost the plot a bit and they made a lot of promises they didn't keep. Maybe they have done it once too often."

"I'm against the single currency but I would not let one issue influence my vote."

"We provide care in the community and the future of the health service is one of the main issues for me."



Diane Cox, 28, Married with two children. Had been considering voting Labour but is worried about interest rates rising.

"The main issues for me are mortgage rates, jobs and taxation. I was thinking of voting Labour but my father says 'You have never lived under a Labour government, you don't know what it's like.'"

"He said there was high inflation and taxation and there was rubbish on the streets. That has got me worrying about what might happen if there was a Labour government."

"She said she has also thought about voting for the Liberal Democrats and is now undecided."



Debbie Fulbrook, 33, Has usually voted Liberal Democrat or Labour and this time will vote for Mr Blair's party to help ensure a change of government.

"I have lived under the Tories for 17 years and it has not helped us in that time. We bought this house seven years ago and interest rates shot up."

"The main other issues for me are education and the health service. Europe does matter but it is not an issue that would change me one way or the other."

"It's closer to home that interests me – and that's why I will vote Labour."

CLEETHORPES: 74th Labour target. Majority of about 30 if Labour wins seat

Despite an admission from Michael Brown, the defending candidate for Cleethorpes, that he accepted £6,000 to ask questions in Parliament, the Tory vote in this re-shaped area seems to be holding up well – but there is a feeling that Labour can take it.

During canvassing by *The Independent*, no one raised the subject of sleaze, yet the words "trust" and "crime" were used over and over again. In an area where crime has almost doubled since 1984, this was an issue that seemed to concern people even more than health, education and unemployment. Yet many Tories said their lack of trust in Tony Blair to do something about it outweighed disillusion with their own party.

Labour needs to overturn a notional majority, after boundary changes, of about 6,500 if its candidate, the Blairite Shona McIsaac, is to wrest the seat from the right-wing Mr Brown.

Despite the cash-for-questions allegations, Mr Brown is regarded as a good constituency MP, but boundary changes have not been kind to him. Large rural areas in the southern part of the old Brigg and Cleethorpes constituency have been lost, leaving Labour to build on strongholds in central Cleethorpes and the oil and chemicals conurbation of Immingham.

Both main parties say they are confident of victory. If Labour takes the seat for the first time in living memory, it can expect a majority of about



Cleethorpes: Crime is main concern. Photograph: David Rose

30 in the Commons. Alicia Chater, Mrs McIsaac's agent, said there were encouraging reports of Tories switching to Labour.

"Word is coming in of people in Tory strongholds like Haverstoe, Humberston and New Waltham coming over to Labour," she said. "In the local elections to the new unitary authority [two years ago], a Labour councillor was elected to Laceby for the first time ever; we believe we have now built on that."

Elizabeth Craig, Mr Brown's agent, disagrees: "Our canvassing shows that Michael's vote is holding up well because of the regard in which he is held as a good constituency MP. The electorate realises that the economy is recovering well and they worry about a future under Labour. They want to have confidence in the country and they don't want to see sovereignty sold out to Europe."

Despite such sentiments, the main complaint about the Tories from their own supporters was that John Major's leadership on Europe was weak.

The main complaint about Mr Blair was that he had no track record and could not be trusted. Many felt Labour would swing to the left once in power. Others felt the Liberal Democrats, represented by Keith Mellon, were the most honest of the parties – but that a vote for them was a waste.

Nigel Lowther, deputy news editor of the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, believes Labour can snatch the seat. "Mr Brown remains a very popular MP despite his various alleged misdemeanours," he said. "But people are taking a great deal of notice of what is happening nationally and some seem to be switching to Labour."

Steve Boggan



Brian Oldham, 66, Retired housing manager.

"I have voted for the Tories since 1979 but I am switching to Labour for two reasons. I believe Tony Blair has changed that and made Labour a viable alternative."

"Under new Labour, the divisions between the two parties have been reduced and policies are now more centralised. Blair realised that the party was in schtick – made it more electable."

"Secondly, but my main priority, is the huge imbalance between rich and poor created in this country under the Tories. I believe Labour will look after the majority of ordinary, honest people and not just an elite at the top."



Kenneth Cunningham, 67, Retired bricklayer.

"Over the years, I have voted 50/50 Labour/Conservative, but I'm voting Labour this time."

"More than anything, people want a change. There have been too many Tory years and it's time for Labour to take over. I believe Tony Blair will win by a landslide."

"Crime seems to have got out of control. It's absolutely rife because young people can no longer be sure of getting a job. Instead, they hang around on street corners and get into trouble."

"Someone needs to give them a chance, and only Labour is promising to get them back to work."



Gary Rockhill, 42, Guest house proprietor.

"I hope that most people are saying they're going to vote Labour, but actually plan to put a cross next to the Tories once they get in the polling booth."

"I still remember what it was like the last time Labour got in power and I don't trust Tony Blair not to do it again. Labour say they have distanced themselves from the unions, but I'm not so sure."

"I also don't trust them on taxes. I know the Conservatives have put taxes up, but I still believe their instincts are to reduce them."



Rachel Barnes, 30, Primary school teacher.

"I'm going to vote Conservative again. For me, it all comes down to whether or not you trust Tony Blair, and I don't."

"I believe hospitals will close under Labour and I actually believe the health service will be safer under the Tories than Labour."

"I am concerned about rising class sizes – ours are usually around 34-35 and that makes teaching more difficult. I know Labour have promised to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds but, once again, it comes down to whether you trust them to keep their promise, and I don't."



John Bayliss, 49, Financial adviser.

"I voted Conservative last time but I haven't made up my mind for this time."

"It isn't that I've been swayed by Tony Blair; it's more that I've become disillusioned with the Tories."

"I don't think people need to be as concerned about a Labour-controlled economy as many are. Mainly, I feel that politicians are out of touch with the concerns people feel over law and order and health."

"And I don't think they realise that most people wouldn't mind paying a penny or two more in taxes if we were guaranteed to get better education and health services."

landslide for Tony Blair is unlikely as the Conservative vote refuses to collapse as voters confound the polls

EALING NORTH: Labour victory would give Commons majority of around 60

Time for a change was a recurring theme on the streets in Ealing North, but having asked themselves "a change to what?" Tory voters appeared to be settling for the Tory Party. One said: "Better the devil you know."

The appeal of John Major was a recurring theme; a worrying factor for Labour was that many Tory voters did not seem to trust Tony Blair. One said: "It's his grin," and a Labour supporter said: "I don't trust him on Europe." That suggests the Tory personal attack on Mr Blair may be hitting the target, in spite of being criticised as puerile. However, many expressed concern at the "tilt-for-tat" nature of the campaign; voters generally are not enthusiastic about the election.



Neil Kinnock's home in Ealing North Photograph: John Voos

One of the prime areas for Labour converts from the Tory Party was said to be Pithanger, a strip of the former Ealing Acton seat, which has been brought into the constituency in boundary changes.

Knocking on doors in the area which includes the leafy street where Neil Kinnock lives, and interviewing passers-by failed to throw up firm "switchers" to Labour. The Tory vote appeared to be holding up.

Standing outside the railway station at Northolt, and the Underground at Greenford produced a similar story. The Tory vote was remaining fairly solid, and showing no enthusiasm for new Labour. Of the two leaders, Mr Major - on the morning after his party election

broadcast on Europe - was emerging as the stronger, even with some Labour voters. One elderly Labour supporter said: "I voted Labour last time. I just wish John Major was not a Tory. He is the best of the lot. The rest all seem wishy-washy."

The high street in Perivale was the same. Voters appear now to be hardening after two weeks of campaigning on the issues.

The west London constituency is number 87 in the list of seats which are vulnerable in a general swing to Labour, but it is not on the party's "target list" of 90 seats.

This may seem surprising. Ealing North was a Labour seat until Bill Molloy, now Lord Molloy, was beaten in 1979 by the Tory Harry Greenway, the outspoken right-wing former headmaster, who has since

made it his own patch. Mr Greenway, an ardent admirer of Baroness Thatcher, has been assiduous in building up a local following, working Ealing North like a councillor.

That personal following is one of the reasons why - in spite of a spirited fight by local activists - it is not being given the target list treatment by Labour. "We have moved the key people somewhere else, into target seats," a party official said.

The Labour campaign is being run from a private house and the Labour candidate, Steve Pound, a wisecracking Labour councillor from Ealing borough, is backed by his wife, and a team of enthusiastic amateurs. He is confident that they will pull it off. "We are getting lots of inquiries from people switching from the Tories," said one of his workers. "They are calling up asking for the manifesto."

Colin Brown

Roger Edwards, 52, runs vehicle restoration business. Mr Edwards is sticking with the Tories.

"I will probably vote Tory because of Harry Greenway. I shall vote Tory because I remember the last Labour government."

"It strikes me that the economy is quite good because we have made it as such. All they [Labour] can do is take more money off us."

"I think I can trust John Major and his policies."

Rupa Patel, 22, student, serving in the family newsagents at Northolt Station. A first-time voter, will vote Labour.

"I was a Conservative. I went to a public school and the ideology was that you vote Conservative because they wanted to keep the private schools."

"But I am concerned about education."

"I was extremely annoyed about the government's decision to reduce student grants by 30 per cent."

"I think they will have Harry Greenway again purely because they have done so for so long."

"Really, I don't trust any of the parties."

Pamela Shrewsbury, 48, solicitor. Was a Conservative, is thinking of switching, but is a "don't know" at the moment.

"I am still listening to everybody. I have voted Conservative in the past. My father was once interviewed as a Tory candidate. I am not totally settled on how I will vote. I am very unhappy about party politics. I don't like party systems. I don't quite take to Blair, and I don't know why."

"Major appeals more to working people because he comes from an ordinary background and he conducts himself very well and honourably."

Fiona Cook, 43, self-employed. She is sticking with the Tories. "The more it is going on, the longer this election is running, the less Labour is doing to get my vote, basically because I think Tony Blair is a megalomaniac."

"He is so full of himself, he is on an ego trip. I am getting fed up with him. All he is saying is that the Tories will do this, and they will do the opposite. I am self-employed, and the thought of Labour getting in is quite frightening."

John Roberts, 63, retired tobacco worker. Mr Roberts, a Geordie, is voting Conservative again.

"My father was a miner. I have done mining. I will definitely not be voting Labour for the simple fact that I know about them through the years. I don't trust them. Blair is just too wonder."

"I cannot understand people being taken in by him. I saw Major on the election broadcast last night [on Europe] and thought he was good. I think this is the most important issue."

CLYWD WEST: A win would give Labour a majority of around 80

Could Labour win Clywd West? The old man thought for a moment. "Well you see," he replied at last, "the Liberal vote has traditionally been very strong here. Half the local population can say Lloyd George slept with their grandmother."

He was exaggerating, of course. The Liberal Democrats only took 15 per cent of the vote in 1992.

But who knows? Perhaps the area's history does help to explain why recent revelations about the marital infidelity of its Conservative MP, Rod Richards, do not seem to have damaged his electoral standing much. Mr Richards had to resign as a Welsh Office minister last year after it was revealed he had been having an affair.



The Lib Dems are popular in Clywd Photograph: Craig Easton

This is not to say the Clywd West Tories are not angry with their party. They most certainly are. They are angry about Europe, angry about what they see as weak leadership, angry about negative equity, angry about business failures.

But though many say they will not vote Conservative this time, a fair proportion admit, when pushed, they they cannot really imagine themselves voting anything else. Some will go over to one of the other parties, but some will stay at home and more will stay, reluctantly, back to the fold.

The Lib Dems and Plaid Cymru are fighting this seat hard, and the Referendum Party is also standing, without much discernible effect so far.

There is also a wild card in the electoral pack, in the form of a man calling himself Rod Richards of the Conservative Party, but Labour is the main challenger.

Clywd West is what is known in Labour parlance as a "stand-alone" seat, with the local party receiving little outside help. John Prescott's battle has apparently whizzed along the Colwyn Bay by-pass without stopping, en route, to the more marginal Vale of Clywd.

The Labour candidate, Gareth Thomas, a barrister, is constantly slipping between Welsh and English as he hammers home Tony Blair's message on the streets. But while he says he is meeting many "switchers" out on the doorsteps, he acknowledges that the result will be tight.

Changes in the area's population and prosperity may help Mr Thomas, as the blue-ribs

"Costa Geriatrics" of old slides towards a new "Dole-on-Sea" culture of benefit-fund addicts, heavy drinking and drugs. But the red-wash constituency - formerly Clywd North West - also has a large rural hinterland where old-style Tories and farming Plaid Cymru supporters co-exist.

But one of the strongest sentiments that emerges is apathy, if not downright hostility, towards politicians and the political process. Women with strong views are hard to find; young people nigh-on impossible.

But the old Tories are still there - a third of the population is of pensionable age - and how ever unhappy they may be, they still do not quite trust Labour.

"That Tony Blair seems a decent man but I don't like the rest of his party and the trade unions. I remember the strikes of the 1970s," is a typical comment.

Fran Abrams



Geraint Jones, 32, Shop assistant

"I'm a Labour voter. I believe Labour will offer the individual more than the Conservatives do. The other parties don't seem to have much idea what to do."

"I think Tony Blair's doing a good job changing the Labour Party into a party which can govern. It's for the better. They went too extreme before."

"I think they've got a chance of getting in here. There were a lot of Tory supporters here that you would expect to be Labour - working-class Tories."



John Crowther, 61, Retired lecturer

"I think I am going to vote for Paddy Ashdown. I voted Liberal Democrat once before, at the last election, but before that I voted Conservative... never voted anything else."

"I thought Margaret Thatcher would be a really splendid, dynamic Prime Minister. But she became such a dogmatic one. A lot of Conservatives are the same - they don't really know how the average man in the street lives any more. The Labour Party will probably get in but I'm not very happy about that. Blair's a reasonable chap but he's a bit like a college boy who's got all these heavyies who might come and push him out."



Marion Childs, Retired nurse and smallholder

"I've more or less decided to vote Labour, but I'm going to see what's happening."

"I used to be a Conservative a long time ago but I don't agree with what they've done."

"I would dearly love to vote Liberal but I don't think they've got any chance of getting in. I would vote Labour if I thought they would get in, but I would also vote for Plaid Cymru."

"I certainly won't vote Conservative and my husband feels the same way as I do."

"We have talked to people who have been Tory families for generations, but they are not going to vote for them."



Diane Phassy, Caravan park manageress

"I'll do the same as always. I'm voting Conservative. I'm happy with my lifestyle. I just don't want Labour to get in."

"Without being critical, the lower class people tend to vote Labour because they don't see things on a long-term basis."

"This country is getting on its feet. The pound is excellent on the continent at the moment."

"I think Labour might get in. People are frightened they will. Everything was going up but now it is going down. Interest rates are coming down, property is moving."



George Rodgers, Assistant head keeper of the Welsh Mountain Zoo

"For the first time ever, I haven't decided which way to vote. I was a Conservative before, but quite frankly I'm disillusioned. I have no faith in the Government and less faith in the Opposition."

"I was suspicious of Tony Blair at first, but I'm not any more. I think he could be a good prime minister, but unfortunately I don't think he would be allowed to be."

"Strong prime ministers are few and far between. Whether you liked her politics or not, I think Margaret Thatcher was a strong prime minister. I didn't always agree with her policies, but at least she got things done."

BRISTOL WEST: A win here means a landslide for Blair, with a majority of around 140

If there is a Labour landslide on 1 May, William Waldegrave's Bristol West seat will be swept away with a swing of 12 per cent, giving Tony Blair a majority in the Commons of around 140.

However, our survey suggests that it is not a Labour target seat, and we found little enthusiasm for Tony Blair's new Labour among Tory voters, in spite of local Labour claims to the contrary.

The Liberal Democrats came second in Bristol West in 1992, and are engaged in a battle with Labour to secure the tactical votes to get the Tories out. But on the doorsteps, there was evidence that some Tory voters are switching to the Liberal Democrats because they want to spend more on public services, such as health and education - a big issue in the City - from higher taxation. Some Liberal Democrats are switching to Labour, afraid they cast a "wasted vote" last time.



Tory vote holding up well in Bristol Photograph: John Voos

are clear signs that the Tory vote is holding up better than the polls suggest. Most of the Tory voters we canvassed were planning to vote Tory again, and said that in spite of insecurity in the work, they were seeing signs of recovery. John Major also rated highly. "All my friends are staying Tory. Despite all the hype about the 'grey man', I think John Major will fight our corner in Europe," said Toni, a chef in the Clifton Downs shopping centre. There is a dull feeling of boredom in the electorate with a party which many felt had been in power too long. "The Tories have run out of steam," said one couple in their 50s, who were switching from the Tories to the Liberal Democrats.

A dental nurse and a retired customs officer living in a big house in Great Brockridge, a Tory avenue in the suburbs, said a lot of their golfing friends were

switching from Tories to Labour, but they were going to vote for the Liberal Democrats.

We followed the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, a fellow of All Souls, as he went through the ritual of pulling votes in a Labour ward. He met Labour voters, Liberal Democrats, and Tories, some including close friends. There was never any outright hostility, unlike the 1992 election in the recession.

He is being challenged by Valerie Davey, a bright Labour candidate and local councillor, who says there is "absolute vivacity" out on the streets about the election. We never found it. Her Liberal Democrat opponent, Charles Boney, runner-up last time, described her as a "sincere christian socialist - not part of the newly converted evangelical tendency" in the Labour leadership.

Colin Brown

Fuscale Thornton, 35, Retail manager. Switching from Tories to Labour. "I have always voted Conservative. I will be voting Labour. You see beggars on the streets. Everything is becoming a charity shop. Britain is a charity shop. I don't think Labour can do any worse. In fact, I would sooner have Maggie Thatcher back."



Terence Derbyshire, 57, Shop keeper

"He is sticking with the Tories. It has got better over the last two years, there is no getting away from it. Look at Germany - they are starting to go through the recession we had a few years ago. Major reminds me of my bank manager. I think he's very good, someone you can trust."



Christine Howells, 45, Illustrator

Staying with the Liberal Democrats. "I am a bit disillusioned with the Government but the Tories have done some good things, including private enterprise."

"In a way, we [Lib Dem voters] are in a cleft stick. I hate the thought that it is a wasted vote. That is why many people are going to vote Labour."

"I am a bit worried Blair is giving everyone such wonderful promises. I don't know whether he can fulfill any."

"I am concerned about the council tax. It is about £600 a year. Lots of people are sending their children to fee-paying schools because they are not happy with local schools."



Dave Jeal, 30, Voluntary church worker

Voting Labour again. "The poor are very poor in this city. Having worked for the homeless in this city, it is diabolical seeing the number of homeless in the streets being kicked out of children's homes."

"I don't think the Tories will get in because they have had such a long time in office."

"However, I think old Labour would have done a much better job than new Labour. I think they are very wishy-washy, champagne socialists."



Brian Trigg, 54, Shortly to retire as a police superintendent

Sticking with the Conservatives. "I have always voted Conservative. I look at their record. If you look at Europe, to be quite honest, you can say we are in many cases leading the rest of Europe. I put that down to some of the independence that we have. I would not want to see some of that independence being compromised. Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, listens to what people are telling him and morale in the police force is very good. Police officers are now paid a reasonable wage. I remember times when police officers were on very low wages."



Local resident

Ministers clash as EU rift widens

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

An open clash between two of John Major's most senior Cabinet colleagues yesterday fed speculation that a Tory leadership contest has already begun.

Michael Howard, the Eurosceptic Home Secretary, told Alastair Stewart on GMTV's *Sunday Programme* that the agenda for June's European Union heads of government summit in Amsterdam "would indeed put our survival as a nation state in question. And if we need someone to negotiate on our behalf, at that summit, who doesn't want to be isolated in Europe, we are taking the most enormous risk."

"The things which we know Tony Blair would sign up to, the surrenders on the veto, more majority voting, the social chapter, would put us firmly on the federal path, firmly on the path to a European superstate."

But when that point was put later to Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer, he disagreed. "We should be a leading member of the European Union," he told BBC1's *On the Record* programme. "We should not be imagining plots against us. I don't think the survival of Britain as a nation state is at risk because of our membership of the European Union. I just don't hold that view."

"What I do think is at risk is whether or not we can be a leading - or the leading - European power in the next century beyond the millennium."

As for the spectre that was being pushed by the Prime Minister last week - that a single currency could lead to a handover of tax and spending power to Brussels - Mr Clarke was equally dismissive.

"I am flatly against handing over control of tax to Europe, flatly against handing over control of public spending to Eu-

rope. So is every other European finance minister I know. No one has even suggested that," he said.

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, said: "Kenneth Clarke and Michael Howard have declared open war on one another. The two Tory parties are now out just out in the open - they are up and running, and at one another's throats."

Tory suggestions that Mr Blair was not up to the job of negotiating a good deal for Britain - the theme of last week's advertisement, showing the Labour leader as Helmut Kohl's dummy - were rejected yesterday by Sir Edward Heath, the former prime minister. "Everybody has got to learn about negotiations, of course," he told Sky News's *Sunday* programme. "But again, people don't accept it because they regard Blair as being a capable fellow."

However, John Major defended the advertisement on a Radio 4 phone-in, saying: "Politics is a robust trade and I dare say if there is one politician who has a right to say that because he has been on the receiving end of most of the robustness in recent years, then you are talking to him at the moment."

Paddy Ashdown told BBC1's *Breakfast with Frost* that many moderate Tories were "dismayed and ashamed by the turmoil in their party", and he urged them to follow the lead taken by the two Commons defectors, Emma Nicholson and Peter Thurnham, and back the Liberal Democrats.

In a speech in Manchester today, Mr Blair will launch a personal attack on Mr Major's leadership qualities, saying: "A party divided against itself, with a leader trying to balance the factions in his party, cannot give any sort of lead. There are two Tory parties and John Major is in charge of neither of them."



Sparring partners: Jonathan Dimbleby (left) interviewing Labour leader Tony Blair on ITV yesterday afternoon

Photograph: Neil Munro

Grammar schools plan in chaos

Fran Abrams and Judith Judd

John Major's plans to put a grammar school in every town were in disarray last night as it emerged that proposals for £500,000 "bribes" to comprehensive schools to make the change have been dropped.

Last week, senior politicians said they were planning to allow schools to apply to become selective under the specialist schools programme, which gives grants of about £500,000 to secondary schools which make £100,000 in business sponsorship.

However, it has now emerged that the plan met with fierce opposition, not least from leaders of the existing programme, which creates schools concentrating on technology,

sport, languages and the arts. They argued that their scheme had been highly successful, but might become less so if it were linked with the politically controversial plans for more selective schools.

Now the plans have been dropped, leaving schools with little reason to choose to become selective. Last night, a leader of the grammar schools movement said they would be unlikely to have any effect if there was no money involved.

Today, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shephard, will announce that parents who want their schools to become grammars can petition for a ballot on the issue.

Margaret Dewar, chairman of the Grammar Schools Association, said that over 40,000 pupils sat 11-plus

exams this year for the remaining 160 schools - but new ones could not be created without funds. Schools would not want to become selective unless they could expand their sixth forms and employ more specialist teachers, she said, and that would cost money.

"I can't believe a school would just change for the sake of change. If there's no financial incentive I don't know how they are going to do it," she said.

Ironically, the change of heart could be seen as a victory over John Major for Mrs Shephard, who had over been in favour of a return to the 11-plus. She had emphasised, and will do so again today, that she would

support a system of fully resourced comprehensive schools.

ways felt that a school is good or bad according to who is the head teacher, not whether it is selective," she said in a newspaper interview two years ago.

The plans for more grammar schools have already met with opposition from campaigners for comprehensive education.

Ben Elton is among the first signatories of a national petition being launched today by the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education. It reads: "Selection is unfair. Selection for some means rejection for the majority. Selection undermines the provision of high quality education for all. I call upon the Government to abandon selection and support

a system of fully resourced comprehensive schools."

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Labour go from red to purple

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Labour is to replace the red flag of Socialism with the Union Jack and the purple of "passion," it was confirmed yesterday.

In a move which will place the opposition's tanks squarely on the Conservatives' lawns, Labour's latest election broadcast will show a Tory tide toppling the Union flag to the tune of "Land of Hope and Glory."

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, said that while the party would continue to use a variety of colours, the emphasis on purple would reflect the fervour in his party for its policies: "Purple is the colour of passion. The passion with which we will be putting forward our cause of education, health and the solutions to youth unemployment and law and order over the next few days is something which I think the whole public will see."

"We are the patriotic party. We stand up for British interests everywhere. We will stand up for British interests in Europe, we will stand up for a better Britain," he said.

The party's new broadcast, to be shown tonight, will not feature Fitz the bulldog, the star of last week's show, but will continue the patriotic theme.

"Fitz is doing very well," Mr Brown said. "His moment of glory was appreciated by the whole country." The broadcast is meant to "reassure, reward and remind" voters by calming fears on tax and speeding, focusing on Labour pledges and underlining the dangers of re-electing the Tories.

Beginning with shots of Tory party conference-goers singing "Land of Hope and Glory", it moves to a series of pictures of run-down hospitals and schools and crime-ridden streets.

The music continues to play as voters are warned that next time, the Conservatives would stop at nothing. As the music fades, viewers see waves washing over a sandcastle and toppling the Union flag. The broadcast aims to portray Tories as snug, and convinced they have a "divine right" to power.

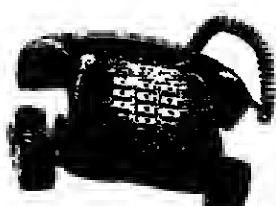
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election '97



On the road: The SNP candidate for Western Isles, Anne Lorne Gillies, on Eriskay and, left, Calum Macdonald, the Labour incumbent taking tea on his calls. 'To hurry by would be regarded as rude,' he says Photographs: Brian Harris

Nationalists play for real in battle for the Isles

Four hundred soldiers of the Royal Artillery armed with Rapier missiles have spent most of this month trying to put down a rebellion by crofters in the Western Isles.

Well that is what Lt Col Nigel Philpott told his men to pretend they were doing. Unfortunately he had not cleared the scenario with the Army's Scottish headquarters and the MoD has been forced to issue an apology.

Faking an insurrection in the middle of an election campaign seems particularly inept in a constituency where the Scottish Nationalists are mounting a big effort to retake the islands from Labour.

Anne Lorne Gillies, the SNP challenger, said she hoped the timing had no connection with election. The scenario dreamt up by Lt Col Philpott is hardly favourable to the Nationalists as it envisaged a Scottish government calling on English help to put down a revolt against rule from Edinburgh.

Calum Macdonald, who has held the seat for Labour since 1987, said the scenario was "plain silly" and brought into question the judgement of a commanding officer normally based in the south-east England. Relations are generally good between the Army and islanders who have campaigned to keep open the missile firing range on Benbecula. Some 200 civilians are employed on the range.

Stephen Goodwin on controversial war games in Britain's remotest seat

The bizarre exercise, with soldiers in war paint clutching automatic weapons and lying by camouflaged missile batteries as island children look on, just serves to emphasise that Britain's most far-flung constituency is a place apart.

Geography and island culture rather than party allegiance or policies shape the politics of the islands' 23,300 voters - by far the smallest electorate in what Ms Gillies pointedly refers to as "the so-called UK".

The Western Isles form a chain some 130 miles long. Only 10 of the 200 or so islands are inhabited, from Vatersay in the south, with just 70 souls, to Lewis in the north with a population of about 22,000.

Unemployment and transport are the main concerns aired to the contenders. To the tourist on a bright June day the islands may appear idyllic, croft houses overlooking a cream sand beach with a fishing boat beyond the bay. But the remoteness carries financial and social costs.

Doorstepping, as I did with Mr Macdonald last week, is a

slow business, with an invitation to come in and chat at almost every house. "To hurry by would be regarded as rude," he explains.

On the fishing island of Scalpay (population 380) we were treated to tea and home-made scones on the best china in the front room rather as if the parson had called.

But it was the first constituency where, on South Uist and Eriskay, I have been frozen out by the SNP candidate's insistence on canvassing in Gaelic. Ms Gillies appears over-anxious to prove her links

to the Western Isles which traditionally votes for one of its own. Mr Macdonald, aged 42, was born and brought up on Lewis.

Gillies stresses her upbringing on a croft near Oban, where her father chaired the SNP branch, and the Argyll port's importance as a gateway to the Isles. Campaigning with the professionalism she learnt as a Gaelic singer and television personality in the 1970s and 1980s, Ms Gillies wears a stylish Harris Tweed jacket, though the effect somehow is more Folletted New Labour than

unsophisticated Hebridean.

Though 95 per cent of the population are reckoned to speak Gaelic, polite convention has it that when non-Gaelic speakers are present conversations are conducted in English.

As for the affinity with Oban, "Six hours away by ferry" was one islander's mocking aside. The absence of tax discs on vehicles on the smaller islands suggests no enthusiasm to be any nearer the seat of authority be it in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

The Scottish Nationalists have high hopes that the 52-year old Ms Gillies will retake the constituency, which in 1970 returned the first ever SNP mem-

ber of Parliament. But the avuncular Donald Stewart was provost of Stornoway, the Western Isles capital, and a local through and through. "He was a fine man," one Scalpay woman told me earnestly after as good as promising her vote on 1 May to Mr Macdonald.

His languorous manner tends to reinforce the whispers of opponents that Mr Macdonald is lazy and has not been shaking as many hands as a man with a majority of 1,703 really ought. But he has a good work record. He pushed through a Bill to aid crofters and points out the stronger position he will be in as their MP if Labour assumes power.

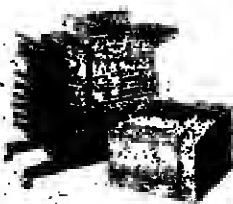
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election '97

TUC chief warns unions over unrealistic demands

Stephen Goodwin

John Monks, the TUC general secretary, yesterday warned trade union leaders meeting in Glasgow not to contribute to the "crude caricatures" painted of them by making unrealistic demands of a Labour government.

Though some of the rhetoric at the Scottish Trades Union Congress remained hardline, with a reminder to Tony Blair that banners would not be packed away, a potentially embarrassing motion on public spending on yesterday's agenda was watered down and further retreats could follow.

But no amount of grinded

teeth moderation could stop Jan Lang, President of the Board of Trade, exploiting the occasion with a charge that "Labour and the unions are joined at the hip and at the wallet". Since 1979, the unions had contributed £100m to the Labour Party and still controlled 50 per cent of the votes at its policy-making conference, he said.

"It is clear beyond doubt that the trade unions today are as dangerous as they ever were," he said, claiming that just 17 of the motions at the conference would cost the British taxpayer £12bn.

A direct challenge to the commitment by Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, to

adhere to Tory public spending totals fell by the way side. It appeared on the final agenda as a call to oppose any freeze on public sector pay and to lobby MPs on the "necessity for their support for adequate funding for public services."

But hardline rhetoric remained. David Bleiman, of the Association of University Teachers (Scotland), said the Government's spending plans left public services facing "appalling prospects" in 1998 and 1999.

"If the money in the Tory spending plans isn't enough to save our public services from devastation no one expects us to pack up our banners and go

home," Mr Bleiman said. "We haven't done that in 18 years of Tory government and we won't do that if there are 18 years of Labour government."

Ken Cameron, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, raised a laugh from the 500 delegates with a denial that a motion opposing privatisation of public services was designed to embarrass the Labour leadership. "This is not the case - because when we submitted the motion it was Labour Party policy," he said.

However, Mr Monks issued a veiled caution to the Labour leader against any backtracking on commitments to a minimum wage and rights to trade

union representation. These were no favours to one interest group, but the "hallmarks of a decent society," he said.

Mr Monks told the conference there was a big difference between passing a resolution and persuading an employer or a government that it was the right thing to do. "The way that unions have been portrayed during this election has been grossly unfair, but we should not contribute to the crude caricatures," he warned.

In a pre-emptive strike, David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said nothing said or passed at the conference would affect policies already set before the electorate.



by Anonymous

It was, of course, a studio audience that had paid to the Welshman. The Candidate winced when he recalled how that decent, vulnerable man had walked into the Granada building feeling fine, his advisers and the world. Four moments would always sum up the Welshman's leadership and only one: the Militant speech - was positive. The other three had all been disastrous: falling in the sea at Brighton, "well, awright!" at the Sheffield Rally and - finally - being laughed at by 200 ordinary Joes and Joannas, his pitiful blustering rerun the next morning at the Tory press conference.

Today's show - a hybrid interview and audience programme bearing the name of its famous presenter - had all the ambush potential of the Granada one, plus the desire of the interviewer himself to go down in history as having presided over the "moment" that transformed the campaign, if he conceivably could.

On Friday afternoon, in the middle of an endless succession of newspaper and magazine interviews (many of them carried out by un-nervingly rough women, wearing chunky jewellery and chunkier perfume), he and a special team had found a couple of hours to plan the appearance. Over at the television station what Friend Bobby (a tormentor turned tormentee) called a "hit squad" of brilliant Oxbridge graduates would have spent the best part of a fortnight plotting his downfall. This was a dispassionate exercise he knew; the following week they would devote just as much effort - perhaps even more - to suckering the Grey Man. But it did not make the thought of them trawling every speech and policy for logical contradictions and U-turns, devising impossible dilemmas for him to resolve, and constructing questions with elaborate, almost architectural attention to detail, any more pleasant.

So the hit squad would have its plan. For his part he had no real plan, other than to perform well. There was not particular message that he had not already given to the nation a dozen times, and there was no new policy that would be divulged on this show, rather than when he, Friend Bobby and Mr Brown had decided it.

The show had all the ambush potential of the Welshman's Granada one

What mattered was that he looked frank, didn't lose it, and that all the plates remained spinning on top of the poles.

"You answer the questions too much," Big Al had growled halfway through their rehearsal. The young lawyer who was role-playing the famous interviewer - complete with hand move-

ments - had been giving a convincing terrier-like performance. The Candidate had attempted to keep up with his interjections, occasionally admonishing his pretend host with a gentle, "if I might just be allowed to reply".

"She didn't answer questions," Al went on.

"She just said what she liked. Bill Boggins would ask her about poverty and she'd ignore him and hang on about enterprise."

"I love a bit of nostalgia," said Friend Bobby. "And she was very hard to interview. But I don't see anyone getting away with that now."

In the end they had reckoned on Europe, tax, perhaps some general stuff on U-turns.

Fifty hours later, and here he was, his face covered in orange powder, sitting in that weird silence which always descends in the 20 seconds before a live show actually goes on air - a silence that never failed to clutch at his stomach. He had it in his power, even now, to throw it away. He could dry up, give an answer that got laughed out of court, and there was always that extraordinary desire (like the one you get at the top of tall buildings) to commit suicide. To say that you did not think that drugs were as much of a problem as alcohol.

After 10 minutes of tussling (on Europe and taxes) he realised that he was doing OK. The audience - put there to silence him - was even applauding. After 30 minutes he felt very good. He had weathered the worst that could be thrown at him, had got his own best lines in and, frankly, had been enjoying himself.

Five minutes later the interviewer called a halt. "Is that the end of the whole programme? I was just getting into my stride," said the Candidate with cheeky disappointment. Upstairs in the hospitality room Big Al turned from the titles rolling on the screen, and addressed his chaperone. "No news in your programme, then," he said, with evident satisfaction.



High command: Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams sharing a thought with Mitchel McLaughlin at the party conference yesterday Photograph: John Voos

Sinn Fein voices poll dream

David McKittrick and Alan Murdoch

Sinn Fein yesterday refashioned its standard annual conference as an election rally, its leaders emphasising their twin goals of electoral advance and a renewal of the peace process.

Party president Gerry Adams declared that the election of a new government in London created a new opportunity to reconstruct the peace process and promised that the party would work with whatever governments emerged in London and in Dublin.

Mr Adams devoted an unusual amount of his speech to appeals for increased dialogue between republicans and Unionists, and the conference was told that Sinn Fein members were having on-going private talks with Protestants.

The republican approach was summarised by Martin McGuinness who declared: "Sinn Fein's priorities are primarily the rebuilding of the process and increasing our mandate in the forthcoming elections on both sides of the border."

Mr McGuinness roused delegates when he claimed that Sinn Fein was winning in three Ulster seats - West Belfast, Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone.

The gathering, which was marked by an absence of dissent, was held in a hotel in Co Monaghan in the Irish Republic. An estimated 700 delegates took their seats in a cavernous dance hall underneath highly inappropriate red, white and blue neon disco lights. Behind the platform a large slogan proclaimed: "A new opportunity for

peace" while an adjacent frieze bore the rather more backward-looking slogan of "Providence sent the potato blight, but England sent the famine."

For much of the day, speakers toured the gamut of lesser issues which party chairman Mitchel McLaughlin described as essential "for any party that intends to impact on the political mainstream."

Delegates lambasted Dublin for "unjustly prosecuting ordinary, decent people" for not paying local water and service charges, for inadequate aid to hard-pressed fishing communities, and for ignoring rural depopulation.

Such is the bread and butter of Caoimhghin O'Caolain, the party's best hope for a seat in the Dail in Dublin since IRA hunger strikers were elected in 1981. A dapper, dark-suited former bank official, now a county councillor, he faced delegates all day from the platform with a beaming smile.

He has built up a fair amount of local support by filling in border roads excavated by the British Army. His perceived chance of success in the Irish election which is expected next month, explained the sifting of the event outside its normal venue of Dublin.

But the event was primarily a carefully choreographed showcase for candidates. Martin McGuinness called for a strong electoral mandate "that will make it extremely difficult for either government to ignore our democratic right to represent our electorate in negotiations." Vice President Pat Doherty, standing in West Tyrone, reaffirmed to strong ap-

plause the party's demands for the release of long-term prisoners, including some whom he said had served more than 20 years in British jails. Bernadette O'Hagan, who is standing in the Upper Bann constituency, pressed for restrictions on loyalist marches during the Orange marching season.

In his speech, Mr Adams said: "Imagine an Ireland in which the guns are silent permanently - an Ireland in which all of the people of this island are at peace with each other and with our neighbours in Britain. Some will say this is a dream, hit it is a dream which we can turn into a reality."

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Netanyahu fights on as court case falls



Netanyahu: Survival fight

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, yesterday welcomed a decision by the attorney-general not to go ahead with his indictment. "The bottom line is I didn't commit any crime, and the attorney-general confirmed that," he said.

Mr Netanyahu escaped prosecution for allowing suspected criminals to dictate the choice of Israel's chief prosecutor, as alleged by the police. But he may face a battle for political survival as members of his coalition

decide if they can remain in the government in the wake of the scandal. The attorney-general, Ahakim Rubinstein, said there was insufficient evidence to bring a trial Mr Netanyahu and Tzahi Hanegbi, the justice minister. No decision had been reached on the indictment of Avigdor Lieberman, director-general of the prime minister's office. Aryeh Deri, a former interior minister and the leader of Shas, a religious party, which is part of Mr Netanyahu's coalition, will be charged with "fraud, extortion and obstruction of justice".

Mr Netanyahu's troubles will not

go away. The decision not to indict him will be appealed to Israel's Supreme Court, which in the past has ordered the prosecution of senior politicians and businessmen to go ahead. Mr Rubinstein said there were grounds for "bewilderment" over Mr Netanyahu's behaviour, but his criticism was not as scathing as had been expected.

He repeatedly said there were grounds for "suspicion" over the prime minister's behaviour but insufficient grounds to bring him to trial. A longer report by Mr Rubinstein and Edna Arbel, the state at-

torney, was issued yesterday evening. The scandal has revolved around allegations that Mr Netanyahu allowed Mr Deri, on trial accused of bribery and fraud, to choose a little known but politically sympathetic Jerusalem lawyer called Roni Bar-On to be Israel's attorney-general. Mr Rubinstein confirmed that Mr Deri has tried to pressure the prime minister, but said he lacked conclusive evidence that the pressure had been effective. Mr Netanyahu's future now depends on his cabinet ministers and coalition partners. Five members of the cabinet are believed to be con-

sidering resignation. Two of them lead parties without which Mr Netanyahu would have no Knesset majority. But the biggest danger facing Mr Netanyahu is that Nathan Sharansky, leader of the Russian immigrants' party, and Avigdor Kahalani, who heads the Third Way, a Labour party splinter group, will abandon him. Both stood as clean government parties in last year's elections and are expected to do well again at the polls. Dan Meridor, the finance minister, is also threatening to resign.

Before the report was issued Mr Netanyahu's office modified its pre-

vious attacks on the police as biased and began to admit that "errors of judgement" might have been made. One strategy for Mr Netanyahu would be to follow up his admission of error by asking Mr Lieberman and Mr Hanegbi to resign. If he is to keep Mr Sharansky and Mr Kahalani in his government then he will have to give them more power. Even if his coalition does hold, the prime minister will be seriously weakened and will have to modify his ambition to install his own supporters in senior positions in the army, security forces, police and civil service.

Peasant power wins the vote in China's rural backwaters

In China's rural hinterland, peasants are discovering the power of the ballot box - and what a stumpy bunch of voters they have turned out to be.

A village elections this month, amid the orchards of Pinglu county, in central Shaanxi province, the issue of the moment was falling apple prices. Chen Jiangong, 34, contemplating how to cast his vote for village chairman, complained: "Right now I have 3.5 tons of apples in hand. If I sell at present prices, the money will only just cover what I spent on fertiliser. We need more markets for our apples."

Feng Nu, 40, voiced a grievance of voters the world over: "Taxes should be reduced," she demanded. Cynicism had overtaken one 69-year-old man: "The problem with the village leaders is that before they become leaders they are okay, but after they become leaders, there's some chemical that happens in their brains and they only make themselves rich instead of leading all the villagers to get rich," he said.

Under Communist Party rule, village elections are the only example of one-person, one-vote democracy in China. Launched in the mid-Eighties, they were originally introduced to replace the village communes that were dissolved after the Cultural Revolution. At the time, few outside China paid much attention.

Now they are suddenly a buzzword for visiting Western politicians eager to defend a policy of "constructive engagement" with China. "Remarkable," declared the United States Vice-President, Al Gore, on his visit to Peking last month. "We are seeing the beginning of a system of elections which will, I believe, move steadily up the scale from the village to the province, and ultimately to the highest national level," predicted Baroness Thatcher in Peking last November.

Not in her lifetime, a more realistic observer would add. But on the ground this month in Pinglu, a poor backwater along the Yellow river, peasants were making their voices heard in a manner which the communist authorities appeared unable to manipulate.

In Xia Zhang village, population 780, those eligible to vote gathered outdoors this month in the village recreation area. They were there to choose a village chairman, deputy and committee members for the next three years. Given the role of apples in public consciousness, it was only right that the 24 voting booths should be red-painted cardboard apple boxes.

Xia Zhang was on its fourth round of village elections, and under a banner reading "Cadres

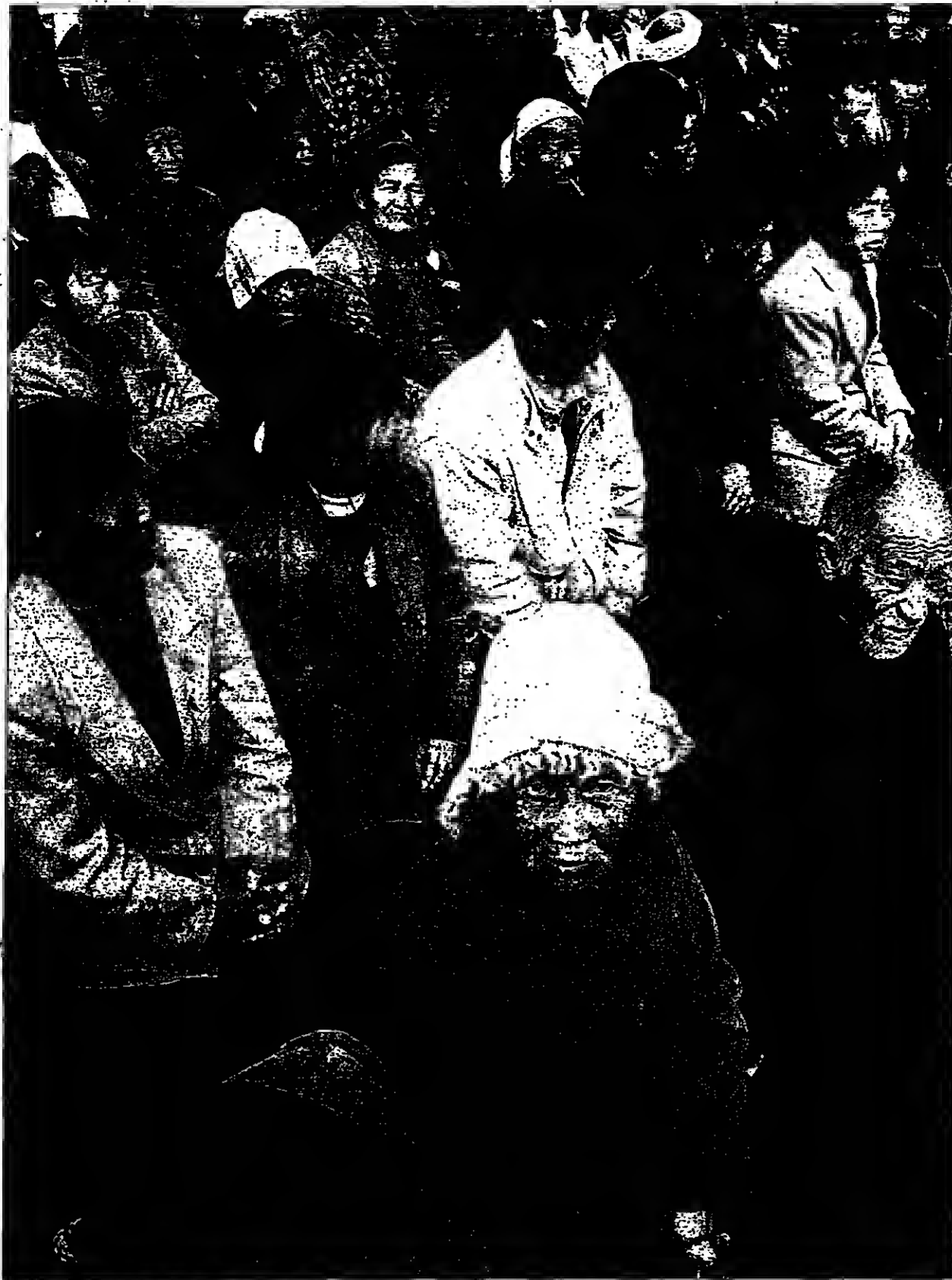
Villagers are learning about democracy, Teresa Poole reports

Elected by the Village work for the Villagers, the candidates, who had been selected days earlier in a preliminary free vote, took to the hustings.

The incumbent chairman, Li Shixing, elected in 1994, was reluctant to be re-elected. "Due to my limited ability, I did not do a very good job for the people since the last election," was Li Shixing's opening bid. "I feel I disappointed people's trust and support in me. So I wish that you, like in the past elections, vote for those able or young people who are capable of bringing benefits to the people and making people rich instead of voting for me."

Li Shixing, the 41-year-old deputy chairman, was the main challenger for the top job. He offered "to make our village richer and richer". He explained: "The hottest issue now in the village is how to improve the village economy, get richer and richer... I'll make a reasonable budget, and let the people supervise it. I'll try to prevent the phenomenon of 'abuse the power for one's own ends'."

Everyone involved in organising or observing China's nearly one million village elections agrees it is impossible to generalise. But it is fair to say that with each new round of elections, procedures have become more democratic, mainly as a result of education by China's ministry of civil affairs. Peasant power is increased because voters can "write in" any name if they do not like the candidates. About half the most recent round of village elections have used secret voting booths, and one-third of village leaders



Waiting game: Villagers in Xia Zhang prepare to cast their votes in local elections

Photograph: Teresa Poole

standing for re-election have been well taught. "I won't even tell my husband, it is not allowed," said 33-year-old Yu Li-uo. No one would divulge their choice to a foreign reporter.

A village chairman and his committee controls the village budget and runs the community's day-to-day affairs. But any

voting was a private affair had been well taught. "I won't even tell my husband, it is not allowed," said 33-year-old Yu Li-uo. No one would divulge their choice to a foreign reporter.

A village chairman and his committee controls the village budget and runs the community's day-to-day affairs. But any

election village leader must also co-exist with the village Communist Party Secretary, who is certainly not chosen by universal franchise. In Pinglu, only about one-third of the 228 village chairmen are party members. Well aware that the future of free village elections would be jeopardised by any sugges-

tion that they undermine Communist Party power, ministry of civil affairs officials prefer to stress that the system can improve the calibre of grassroots party members. It is estimated that about one-third of non-party village chairmen are co-opted into the party after election.

In Xia Zhang village, they called it "singing the ballots" as the results were tallied and marked on a public blackboard. No candidate had reached the necessary 50 per cent mark in the first ballot, so two days later there was a re-run. Li Shixing took the chairmanship, and a "write in" candidate, Chen Jianxing, emerged as the deputy.

So what of Lady Thatcher's prognosis of grassroots democracy rising through the Chinese political system? There are no plans by the Chinese government to extend direct elections to town and county government leaders. In a one-party state with a tightly controlled media, a peasant in Pinglu county (population 230,000), is not going to be given the information necessary to decide whom they want as county chief.

significant shorts

Indian coalition chooses new prime minister

Inder Kumar Gujral, the new United Front coalition leader, was named India's new prime minister, ending three weeks of chaotic political manoeuvring. Mr Gujral and his cabinet are to be sworn in today, news agencies reported. Mr Gujral, 77, succeeds HD Deve Gowda, who lost a confidence vote last month when a feuding ally, the Congress Party, withdrew support for his government.

AP - New Delhi

Hong Kong bridge sabotaged

Saboteurs damaged Hong Kong's showpiece Tsing-Ma bridge, the world's longest road-rail suspension link, barely a week before Margaret Thatcher was set to declare it open.

A police spokesman said cables along the emergency tunnel under the road level of the two-tier bridge had been deliberately cut in 32 places and investigators had classified the case as criminal damage.

Reuters - Hong Kong

Ministers quit over hostages

Peru's interior minister and national police chief have resigned, citing security lapses that allowed left-wing rebels to seize hostages at the Japanese ambassador's residence. Interior Minister Juan Briones, an army general, said he was assuming political responsibility for the hostage crisis, now stretching into its fifth month.

AP - Lima

Fatal orders to shoot

A sergeant-major in the Spanish army turned his gun on a corporal and shot him dead after the soldier refused an order to shoot him. Sergeant Major Juan Carlos Miravete was said to have handed his gun to 19-year-old Samuel Ferrer and ordered the soldier to shoot him. When he refused, Miravete was reported to have grabbed the gun and shot Ferrer in the chest.

Reuters - Madrid

Winnie's soiled memories

Winnie Mandela is selling bottles of soil for 50 rand (£7) from the house she shared with her former husband President Nelson Mandela in the 1950s, a South African newspaper said on Sunday.

The *Sunday Times* said each bottle came with a certificate of authenticity signed by Mrs Mandela (right) and a history of the house in Soweto.

Mrs Mandela has turned the garage of her old home into a thriving tourist attraction.

Reuters - Johannesburg



Bonn admits to more cuts

The Bonn government denied reports Germany might be excluded from the single European currency for exceeding its budget targets, but officials admitted more cost-cutting was needed to ensure Emu entry.

The *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper reported that because Bonn's cash deficit in the first three months stood at 40bn German marks (£14.7bn), the government had already used up most of the DM53.4bn it has allowed for its budget deficit for 1997.

Reuters - Frankfurt

Victims of Nazis remembered

About 500 people joined an ecumenical service linking Roman Catholic, Croat, Serb Orthodox, Jewish and Slav Muslim clerics in Croatia to commemorate victims of a Second World War fascist prison camp where tens of thousands of Serbs and Jews died. Set up by Croatia's 1941-45 Nazi puppet "Ustasha" regime, the Jasenovac camp also claimed the lives of gypsies and Croatian anti-fascists. The ceremony recalled the day 52 years ago when 50 inmates escaped, effectively closing the camp as fascist rule collapsed.

Reuters - Jasenovac, Croatia

'Gondolier' steers into trouble

A Finnish tourist who tried night-time joyriding in a Venetian gondola was caught by police whose suspicions were aroused by his incompetence. Police suspected the Finn might not be one of the city's famous watermen because of his unorthodox use of the boat's single oar and his inability to steer. The man was brought back to land and accused of attempted theft.

Reuters - Venice

Chirac set to gamble on early French elections

John Lichfield
Paris

President Jacques Chirac is today expected to dissolve the French parliament and call early elections, ostensibly to clear the ground for a final push into the European single currency.

In reality, Emu provides the cover for several less noble, more tactical arguments, which have overcome the president's doubts and persuaded him to call the poll eight months early, probably at the start of June.

Although Mr Chirac's centre-right supporters have an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly, the two-round election is likely to be closely fought. Recent opinion

polls are divided, some forecasting a narrow victory for the government, others a hung parliament with the Socialists, Communists and Greens forming the largest block.

The president was officially said to be spending the week-end "in reflection", after weeks of badgering for an early poll by his political allies, led by the Prime Minister, Alain Juppé. According to *Le Monde*, citing senior government sources, the decision is made. Mr Chirac will make the announcement on television tonight.

This clearly represents a gamble. The mood of the country remains truculent, even more so. Unemployment is

stubbornly high. The president's instinct was to wait until the constitutional deadline next March. But Mr Juppé and others argued that the electoral climate would get worse, not better, as the year wore on. The first signs of green shoots in the French economy might wither, forcing further spending cuts to bring France within the guidelines for Emu membership.

Several legal investigations of Chirac and Juppé allies, including two senior ministers, are likely to come to an embarrassing head before the summer. What is more, Mr Juppé argued, an early poll would catch the opposition parties months short of battle-readiness. The Socialists, led by Lionel Jospin, have

failed to produce a coherent, alternative programme to the state-shrinking reforms proposed and unevenly carried through by the government. Tony Blair's apparent success in Britain has provoked criticism within the French left of Mr Jospin's failure to give the Socialists a new post-Mitterrand mission.

Equally, an early poll is unlikely to suit the far-right National Front, which lacks the resources to accelerate preparations for a June election.

According to the polls, the NF will receive only around 15 per cent support nationwide, but surveys have tended to undercount likely far-right votes in the past. A performance in the 15 to

17 per cent range would put the NF into the second round in more than 100 constituencies, provoking awkward three-cornered fights with the left and centre right which would make the overall result difficult to predict.

When he makes his nationwide broadcast, President Chirac will ignore all these messy tactical considerations. He will say that he is dissolving parliament to ensure that France is strong and unified for the single greatest historical and constitutional challenge facing the country, the decisions on the starting line-up for the European single currency next spring.

There is some truth in this presentation. An election next March would have fallen in

the middle of the final Emu negotiations. But France already voted, narrowly, in favour of the Maastricht treaty and Emu in 1993. The constitutional and European argument for an early election is weak and could rebound against the president.

By fighting the election on France's European destiny, Mr Chirac and Mr Juppé hope to harness the generally positive French feelings about Emu in their own cause. But the mood of the country remains skittish and pessimistic. Doubts about Emu are growing on both the left and right. There is a risk that the inflammatory anti-Emu arguments presented by the FN, the Communist and others - that the single currency is a dou-

ble attack on sovereignty and the welfare state - will ignite in the middle ground of politics.

The governing centre-right coalition faces awkward decisions, therefore, on its own election programme. If it calls for further state-shrinking and spending cuts, it could be in difficulty. Some would like to see a more coherent anti-state, lower-tax, growth-boosting programme, on the British and US models. But allegiance to statist approaches, and abhorrence of Anglo-Saxon liberalism, remains strong.

Mr Chirac may be calling an early election for tactical reasons, but the stage is set for what could be a fascinating battle for the political soul of France.



Chirac: Acting against his own instincts

international

Hurrahs and tight security for Korea's defector

Richard Lloyd Parry
Seoul

Hwang Jang Yop, the most senior official ever to defect from North Korea, finally arrived in the South Korean capital, Seoul, yesterday, declaring his wish to see the peninsula reunified, but warning of the military danger from his former homeland.

Sixty-seven days after his unexpected plea for asylum at the South Korean embassy in Peking, Mr Hwang's arrival was a curious mixture of media circus and high-security operation.

His descent from the aircraft amid shouts of "hurray!", was broadcast live on all three of South Korea's television news channels. But the Filipino commercial jet on which he arrived was escorted to Seoul by South Korean fighters and, as the 74-year-old defector climbed into a waiting car to be whisked to a secret location in Seoul, a bul-

letproof jacket peeped from under his suit.

As a former secretary of the Worker's Party, Mr Hwang is expected to bring with him unprecedented insights into the workings of the North Korean regime and its "Dear Leader", Kim Jong Il. His opening remarks, however, did little more than echo the official position of the South Korean government.

"I came to South Korea because I am convinced the only way out is to block war by joining hands with brothers in the South," he quavered. "North Korea seems to think there is no option but to use the powerful military force it has built up over decades..."

"If my compatriots in the South permit, I only hope to show repentance to some degree before my race by joining forces to block war provocations and devoting my

remaining energies to peaceful reunification."

To some South Koreans, though, Mr Hwang's sudden enthusiasm for reunification is not entirely convincing. Until his dramatic defection on 12 February, he appeared to be a loyal party member, best known for codifying

"juche", North Korea's brand of "self-reliance".

The circumstances leading up to his defection are not known, but diplomats in Seoul speculate that the imminent fear of being purged had as much to do with it as the love of freedom. The leader of South Korea's conservative United Liberal

Democrat Party, Kim Jong Pil, warned last week against welcoming Mr Hwang as a hero.

Defectors to South Korea often find an ambivalence in their new countrymen - welcome and curiosity, but sometimes mixed with a wariness and suspicion. As the North Korean economy has declined over the

last few years, with food shortages threatening to turn into full-blown famine, the number of defectors has increased, raising the possibility of an eventual refugee crisis.

Quite apart from the cost of rehabilitating former North Koreans, there is also the question of what happens to those they

leave behind. If past form is anything to go by, Mr Hwang's family in Pyongyang face, at best, the loss of all their privileges, at worst, imprisonment and persecution.

"I could not disobey the order of my conscience," he explained yesterday. "All those I love put together cannot be

Asylum: Main picture, Hwang Jang Yop (left) and his aide, Kim Duk Hong, raising hands and hats in triumph at Songnam military airport outside Seoul yesterday. Left, Kim Jong Il, North Korea's Dear Leader.
Main photograph: Kim Byong-Man/AP

traded for the life-and-death fate of the 70 million people of our race."

Mr Hwang's defection in Peking was an embarrassment to the Chinese government which has traditionally been the ally of the North. After a month of secretive negotiations, he was flown to a hidden location on the Philippines for a discreet cooling off period.

His arrival yesterday came the day after North Korean diplomats in New York failed two days running to turn up for a meeting with American and South Korean counterparts to discuss a proposal for peace talks.

Forgotten heroes return to valley of nightmares

Richard Lloyd Parry
Gloucester Hill, South Korea

"When I finally left," says Phil Hawkins, "I hated this country, and everything in it. I never wanted to see it again. Every year after I got home I used to have nightmares that the Chinese were coming up the hill for me, every April on the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th."

The minibus comes to a stop and Mr Hawkins peers cautiously out onto a narrow road between two steep rocky hills. "Welcome to my home in April 1951," he says.

Yesterday, along with 70 veterans of the Korean War and their families, Mr Hawkins visited the place where his bad dreams began.

Nowadays, it is a peaceful, wooded valley where some 300 people, including diplomats, generals and the Duke of Gloucester, laid wreaths and said prayers yesterday at an annual service of remembrance. Mr Hawkins' memories go back to his last visit here, and the battle which began 46 years ago tomorrow.

The Korean campaign, fought under the flag of the United Nations, was dominated by America, politically and militarily. The 87,000 British soldiers, sailors and airmen who came to Korea represented the second largest contingent in the 16-nation army, and nearly 4,000 of them were killed or wounded, with many more sitting out the war in Chinese prisoner of war camps.

But their contribution was eclipsed by the Korean and American armies who fought the most famous battles and suffered the worst casualties.

Veterans, with more than a little bitterness, refer to the campaign as the forgotten war, and it is appropriate that the most famous British encounter was a heroic defeat, the last stand of the Gloucestershire Regiment at the Battle of the Imjin River. Barely five years after the end of the war in Europe, the fate of South Korea, and its unpredictable dictator, Syngman Rhee, meant little in Britain.

"We had a song that went 'We're fighting for that bastard, Syngman Rhee,'" says Mr Hawkins, a craftsman in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, attached to the Gloucesters. "But no one had much idea what it was all about."

Leo Swanton, a veteran of the Normandy landings, remembers being told that "this was the last chance to stop the communists before they got right to Australia".

In April 1951, 29 Brigade found itself on the hills overlooking the Imjin river. Of the 650 Gloucesters who began the battle, barely one in 10 walked away.

Unknown to them, their hills lay across one of the main at-

tack routes of the Chinese "People's Volunteers", who had entered the war six months before in support of the North Korean army. On 22 April they attacked.

"It was like Wembley," said Leo Swanton, who escaped from the battle with a bullet in his leg and shrapnel lodged in his arm. "You couldn't miss, there were so many of them and they were so close. I looked down, and there was a face sticking up out of the river, right in front of me. He got an army boot in the face. After that, we ran."

For four days, the units of 29 Brigade gradually withdrew, until only "Gloucester Hill" was defended. The Chinese attacked at night, and in the most eerie fashion.

"There'd be no sound," remembers Mr Hawkins, who was 18 at the time. "And then they'd suddenly start coming up through the dark, blowing bugles, banging drums and gongs,

It was like Wembley. You couldn't miss there were so many of them so close"

and throwing grenades." Some of the British believed the Chinese soldiers were drugged because of the suicidal fearlessness with which they faced the mortar and artillery fire.

The official estimate puts the number of Chinese killed or critically injured at 11,000.

The Chinese passed around "Gloucester Hill", cutting it off from the rest of the United Nations forces. The tanks which were sent through to relieve it were beaten back, and on 25 April the order was given to "exfiltrate" through the seven miles of enemy held ground. Sixty-seven men made it back alive, 59 were killed, 526 were taken prisoner.

The burned hills and muddy villages which Phil Hawkins remembers from 1952 are green and prosperous now. However, the war itself ended in an enduring stalemate - eight miles from Gloucester Hill, within sight of yesterday's battlefield tour, is the demilitarised zone and beyond it North Korea, hardly less isolated than it was in the 1950s.

"It seemed like a complete waste of time," says Mr Hawkins. "What was gained? Why were we there? 'But then you see how grateful the people here are, and how much better off they are than the ones in the North. And you think, it was worth it. And I will be back.'"



Introducing the Volvo V40. It's roomy, like the big estates. (There's 50 cubic feet of luggage space, and you can even fold the front passenger seat flat.) It's safe, like the big estates. (The V40 has SIPS with side airbags, driver's airbag and ABS brakes.) It's even surprisingly quick, just like the big estates (0-62 takes just 9.3 seconds in the 16 valve 2 litre model.) But the V40 has one thing the big estates don't have. Curves. The Italians, who know a thing or two about car design, recently voted it 'the most beautiful estate in the world'. And who are we to argue? The V40 from Volvo. It's smaller, but it's perfectly formed. From £15,620 to £19,920 on the road. Or from £290 per month via Volvo Contract Hire. VOLVO. A CAR YOU CAN BELIEVE IN.

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Socialists are trounced in Bulgarian poll

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

Bulgarian reformers yesterday celebrated an emphatic parliamentary election victory over the ex-Communists who have dominated the country for all but a single year since the collapse of the old regime in 1989. With almost all results in from Saturday's election, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and their coalition partners had 52 per cent of votes, and the Socialist Party, made up of former Communists, had 22 per cent.

The UDF was expected to take 136 or 137 seats in the 240-seat parliament, and the Socialists 57. Third place was won

by the Union for National Salvation, which groups ethnic Turks and Bulgarian monarchists and won 7 per cent, giving it 20 seats.

The UDF leader, Ivan Kostov, who is expected to become prime minister, said his four priorities were to implement economic reforms agreed with the International Monetary Fund, tackle organised crime and corruption, open the secret police files on public figures, and prepare Bulgaria for membership of Nato and the European Union. In these tasks he can count on the support of President Petar Stoyanov, elected last November on the UDF ticket.

With reformers in control of the presidency, government and parliament, Bulgaria may have its best chance yet to accelerate the pace of change and catch up with countries such as Hungary and Poland. The Socialists, who have controlled most of Bulgaria's nine governments since the end of one-party rule in 1989, proved to be much more reluctant reformers than their Polish and Hungarian ex-communist colleagues. Bulgaria's experience closely parallels that of Romania, where former communists retained power after 1989 but were eventually thrown out last year in presidential and

parliamentary elections. The UDF achieved its victory after leading a month of street protests in January that forced the Socialists to call early elections and cede power to an interim government. With the Bulgarian economy in crisis, few gave the ex-communists much of a chance in Saturday's vote.

However, the new government's honeymoon with the public is likely to be short-lived, given that the UDF will have no choice but to introduce painful measures to begin with. Under the Socialists, hyper-inflation destroyed Bulgarian living standards, the currency went into free-fall, and the government was virtually bankrupt.

Mr Kostov, an economist, said Bulgaria had a chance of emerging from crisis, but the new government needed to establish firmly reformist credentials. "It is important that we convince the world that a relapse into the past is out of the question," he said.

International lenders have promised a \$1.2bn (£750m) loan provided that the government follows a course of strict monetary discipline and privatisation of the still state-dominated economy. The banking sector, which virtually collapsed under the Socialists, must also be rebuilt.

Russia's new men gear up to face the muzhik

MOSCOW DAYS

It is 11pm. On the television, Chuck Norris is cheerfully brandishing a pistol in the face of a bewildered-looking blonde. On my desk lies a copy of the *Moscow News*; I can't help noticing that half a page is devoted to a story headlined "Russia's Arnold Schwarzenegger".

Russia lacks many things but this particular species of male is not among them. A friend assures me that, here in Moscow, they believe you can read a man by his haircut. How, I wonder? So many – at least among the young – seem to have the same one, a cranium-bagging carpet that doesn't know whether to stand up or lie down, and usually ends up doing both, forming a wavy line of exclamation marks above a frown, breeze-block pectorals, and a double-breasted suit.

The man in the *Moscow News*, 25-year-old Alexander Nevsky, is a particularly striking figure. There is a photo of him, bare-chested but for a leather jacket unzipped to the pubis. He, too, is a lawn-head, although his crop is tamed by gel, the finishing touch on a hit-me-if-you-dare face that would not be out of place at Stamford Bridge.

"I was never taught to fight," complains Mr Nevsky to the *News*, a former bouncer who became Mr World 1995. "I think this is unfortunate. When I was a teenager, things were a lot different than they are now – we fought honestly, one-on-one. Now, everything is so intense, and I think that the most helpless and defenceless boys are the ones from the good families. However pompous it may sound, muscles will help them in their pursuits. Muscles aren't a panacea against any danger, but they really boost one's self-confidence."

Like the highly-paid action hero he aspires to be, he is keen to show that he is basically a goodie, a white hat. He rails fiercely against the evils of young Russians taking steroids, recommends the merits of education, warns that brains are as important as brawn, and plugs his book, *How to Become a Schwarzenegger in Russia*. In life, he explains, he depends on his mum, his girl, and his cat.

All societies have their stereotypes, but Russia's *muzhik* – the no-nonsense guy's guy – has got to be one of the most deep-rooted. He goes back centuries, and is daily perpetrated by social conditions: the army, the police force, the security services, the flourishing private security guards industry and – in this new age – the advertising business whose commercials are dominated by granite-jawed guys and sud-covered women.

Inevitably, he therefore populates the political landscape,

from Boris Yeltsin – with his down-home, pie-baking, wife Naina and pugilistic style – to several of his challengers, including the gravel-voiced general Alexander Lebed, the Communist leader, Gennady Zyuganov, and Yuri Luzhkov, the 60-year-old mayor of Moscow.

So it was wonderfully refreshing to meet Andrei Sinechikov. Andrei is 29-years-old, the son of a senior army officer. He is thin, tall, gaucoid and smug. If the haircut test is to be taken seriously, then his long fair hair is encouraging: you could not find a man less concerned about his biceps. But he is not lacking in courage.

Andrei is organiser of a group called Male Solidarity, and is in the process of form-

ing a club for "repentant" Russian men who no longer wanted to be corralled by social pressures into being guy's guys. Several years ago his American girlfriend left him because, he believes, he was too much of a stereotypical Russian male (although we are not talking here about a wife-thumping vodka-swiller). He simply failed to appreciate her desire for independence – her insistence, for example, that she might sometimes pay the bill in a restaurant. Now he has a new girlfriend, also American, with whom he claims to enjoy a truly equal partnership.

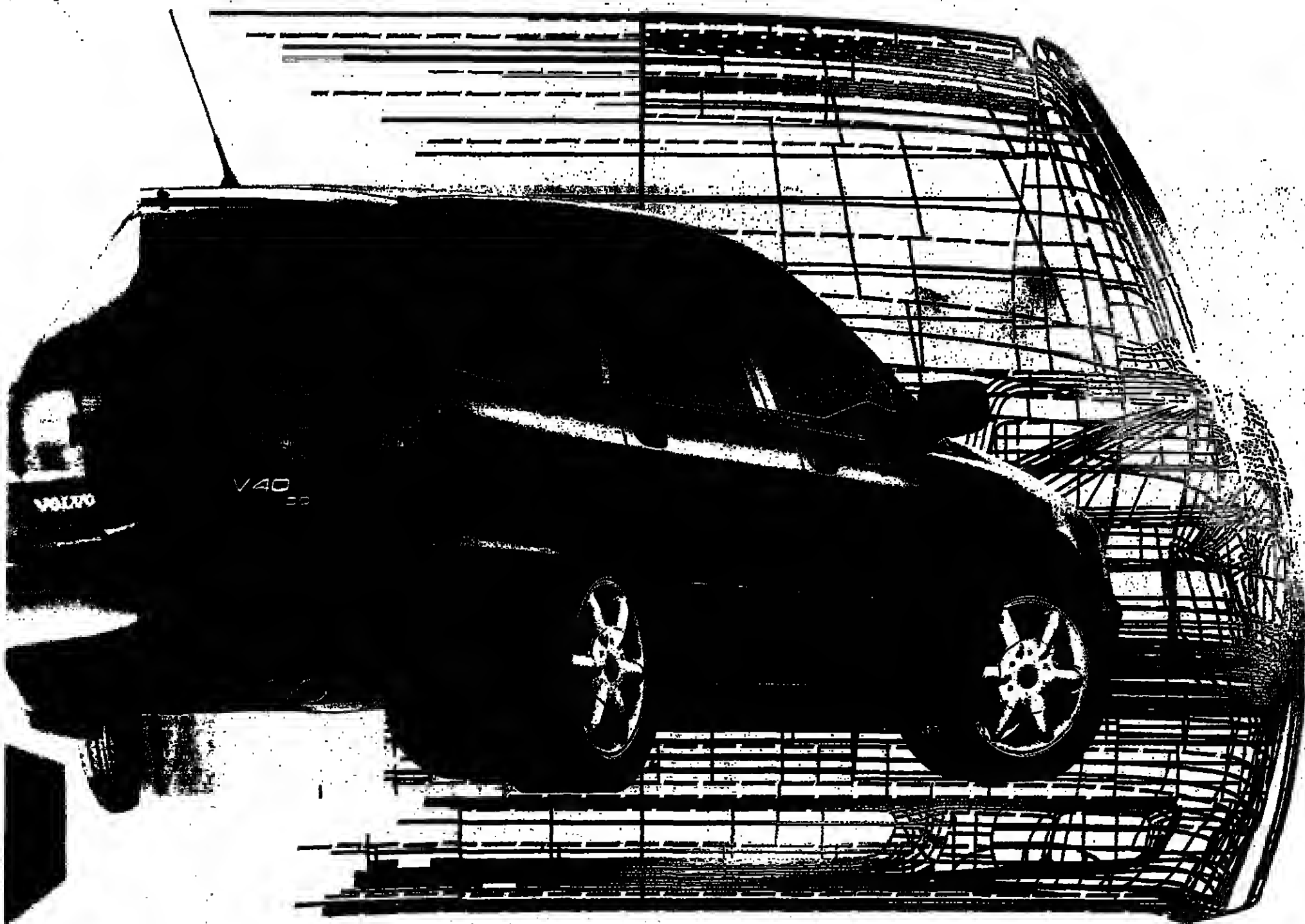
"In Russia, we have a formula for women – kitchen, church, housework," he explains. "But there are also two archetypes created by commercials – men are always something between a bandit and a businessman."

"We want to create a precedent. I know that there are a lot of men here who are not comfortable with their roles... yet they cannot imagine that there is another way to behave. The social pressures are great. Many women, for example, believe that boys have to go into the army before they are considered as men. It is a sort of initiation process. We have a lot of myths like that."

All true. What is less clear though, is that Andrei can make a difference.

Phil Reeves

IT'S BUILT ALONG THE SAME LINES AS OUR BIG ESTATES.
BUT WITHOUT ALL THE STRAIGHT LINES.



VOLVO
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Life is a one-woman show

Interview



Deborah Ross
talks to
SIAN PHILLIPS

Sian Phillips is very excited. Shirley Bassey was in the audience last night, as was Madonna, and they both came backstage to congratulate her. "Madonna sat on my bed - my bed! - in my dressing room! NO! I can't remember a word of what she said. I was too beside myself. I adore Madonna. If anyone living today is like Marlene Dietrich then it's Madonna, isn't it? She's so charismatic. Ah, now I remember. She wanted to see my dress. 'Show me the dress,' she said. But I couldn't because it had already gone into the safe. Madonna! In my dressing room!" Poor old Shir! I don't think she got a look-in.

Whatever, I am happy for Sian because, let's face it, it's about time she had a big hit. And *Marlene*, her one-woman tribute to Dietrich at the Lyric, Shaftesbury Avenue, is proving very much that.

No, the script isn't up to much, frankly. As homages go, it's a lazy one. What you know going in is also what you know coming out. But Sian's performance is dazzling. If nothing else, try to get in for the last half-hour when she puts on *The Dress* - a Jean-Louis imitation which took "four people seven weeks to head and cost God knows how much" - and sings "Falling In Love Again". It's worth it just for that.

The funny thing about Sian Phillips, now I think about it, is that she's always been up there without ever being up there. We kind of know she is a tip-top actress, but at the same time for every *Marlene* (or *Livia* in *I Claudius*) there seems to have been 10 years of doing creaky productions in rep with co-stars who had nowhere to go once their telly shows were up. A touring production of *The Lion In Winter*, with David McCallum playing Henry II to her Eleanor of Aquitaine, springs nastily to mind.

How, I naturally wonder, has this peculiar dichotomy come about? I mean, you never find Judi Dench or Maggie Smith giving it their all in the sticks somewhere, do you? Is it a problem of range, perhaps? No, she thinks it's to do with "marrying O'Toole and losing the moment". His ego ate hers up, then? Yes, she says, that's about it. And, yes, it's taken her many years to recover. But she insists she isn't bitter. In fact, she's learnt a lot doing ghastly things in rep. "I've learnt," she says, "to love acting for what it is rather than for what it can bring you." Although, if it brings you Madonna, that's OK, too.

Sian Phillips must be 62 or thereabouts - no, she won't tell you her exact age - but she is still quite something to look at. She has those big blue-grey eyes. Her skin is still in good nick. And those cheekbones! They are so astonishing she looks as if she's had her insides sucked out at some point.

Yes, Marlene had amazing cheekbones too, but she cheated by "having her back teeth removed". Also, she kept her skin tight-looking by plaiting her hair and attaching the braids to surgical needles which she then embedded in her scalp under her wig. Yeuch, I say. But Sian says it's simply how women gave themselves facelifts in those days.

"Margaret Lockwood always used to do it. Once, one side fell down while she was queuing for lunch in the BBC canteen. She then had to sit and eat with half a tight face and the other half flopping all over the place. But she didn't mind. She was a great sport." No, Sian has never resorted to such measures. Neither has she had plastic surgery. Yet, "I am not against it. I'm all for it, in fact. I've just read about laser surgery, which sounds wonderful. I shall investigate, believe me."

Sian lives in Kensington, west London, in a two-bedroom flat which has a pretty, sunken garden out back. Here, we sit under a green-and-white striped canvas

thingy which looks like a cross between a jousting tent and a chuppah, but which, according to my Argos catalogue, is actually "a luxury garden canopy". Sian calls it her Dame Judi Dench Memorial Canopy because "Judi made me buy it. I'd been thinking of getting one for ages, so she said: 'Do it. Pick up the phone and order it now.' So I did."

Sian lives with two Burmese cats, Rupert and Barnaby, who are company enough for her, thanks very much. Marriage may have worked for some people, but never for her. "All that stuff about what's for supper. Such a waste of time. Sometimes you only want a cup of soup and to get on with your phone calls." Peter was exhilarating, yes, but he also very nearly destroyed her. As for Robin Sachs, her subsequent husband, he ran off with someone else. Men have proved disappointing all round. She likes her cats better.

A few years back, she says, she finally passed her driving test by imagining Barnaby was in the back. "Barnaby's quite a nervous cat and I wanted to give him the nicest ride possible." When she goes abroad, she writes them letters which she carries about tucked in her shirt pocket for a day ("to pick up my scent") before sending them home. "They get very excited and rip open the envelope." She has been known to leave them messages on the answering machine.

Later, when she talks about having had a four-month course of CAT therapy, there is a delicious moment of confusion when I assume that this must be some kind of treatment, possibly invented by Carla Lane, which allows you to relate better to the feline members of your household.

I even, I'm afraid, ask if she took her cats along to the sessions. Sian looks at me perplexed, then, the penny dropping, she good-naturedly explains it's actually some-

thing called Cognitive Assertiveness Training. This, she says, enables you to "stop being a wimp" while "getting what you want from life".

I tell her she has never struck me as a wimp. In fact, I add, I've always thought of her as the opposite, as quite a highly strung, demanding *grande dame*. Sian laughs heartily, then says I'm woefully wide of the mark. O'Toole didn't want her to work, so she didn't. She married Robin to please him. "He was very persistent and I couldn't be bothered not to marry him in the end."

She bought her luxury garden canopy because Dame Judi ordered her to. Not

because you weren't allowed to be a married teacher in Wales in those days. Her father, David, was a trained operatic tenor who had to give up all thoughts of a professional singing career when his father, a miner, died of silicosis, and he had to get a job in a steelworks to support the family.

Both frustrated, they pinned their hopes on their only child. In particular, her mother very much wanted Sian to have a good career. "She actually warned me against marriage. She would say: 'Sian, if you want a career, have a career, but don't try to have anything else.' She adored O'Toole, but still she was rather pleased when I left him. She

grandmother came out and said: 'Didn't the girls have wonderful complexions?' She didn't know make-up even existed."

At 17 she came to London, to attend Rada, and a couple of years later met O'Toole. She took him back to Wales, where he was a great success. "He was like an exotic bird that had landed. Everyone adored him. They'd never seen anyone drink like him. The men would stay up late and chat to him. In the morning they'd still all have to get up at 5am and go to work, but he would be in bed till lunchtime. They'd never known anyone stay in bed after 7am." However, he did upset her grandmother, who was responsible for cleaning the shoes for the entire farm. "She was terribly upset because his boots were suede and she'd never seen suede. She kept peering at the boots and polishing but couldn't get a shine."

After their marriage in 1959, they moved to the west of Ireland, where they built themselves a rollicking big house. Here, Sian had the babies - two daughters, Kate and Pat - while Peter went off to do rather more glamorous things, like *Lawrence of Arabia*. Yes, she was lonely and felt isolated. Being able to work would have helped, but Peter was against it. "Did I mind? Yes, I minded terribly."

The marriage lasted 20 years. Yes, she loved him and, certainly, no one's come near to matching him. But, that said, he needed a lot of looking after and she got fed up of looking after him. She's only seen him once since, at her mother's funeral. No, she doesn't think this odd. "We had no reason to meet again." The children? "Well, they were grown, so there was nothing to discuss there." She never saw Robin again after she called it a day, either. She is good at closing chapters, it would seem.

When she married Robin, an actor she met during some touring job, she was 40

and he was 23. Friends said "Don't do it", but she did anyway. He was very in love with her and, she says, it seemed unkind not to. Sian is out, on the whole, a silly woman. But to marry a man because he'd be upset if you didn't? That's a bit silly, isn't it? "Marriage meant something to Robin, so I did it for him. But you're right, of course, I should have resisted more."

The marriage limped on for 11 years, until Robin went on to America to check out work opportunities and returned with the news he had met someone else. "Robin wanted to discuss the situation. But I said: 'Just get me out of this equation. Now. And if you can be gone by bedtime, all the better.'"

Colly, I say, that doesn't sound winny. No, she says, it doesn't, does it? She is, she says, blissfully happy now. She has her cats. She has her canopy. She may or may not have a lover. ("I'm afraid I'm not going to answer that question, because I'll probably lie.") And she has her soaps. She loves *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Brookside*, all of which she watches and then watches on her telly in the bedroom when she gets back from the theatre. "Yes, it's hard work keeping up, but I love them so." No, she's never been able to get on with *Emmerdale*. She's not sure why.

She is, she says, never lonely. When she was married to Peter, then she was lonely. When she was married to Robin she was often lonely, too. But living on her own, she isn't. She actually really likes it. She says that when she gets into bed by herself at night, and puts on *EastEnders*, "my toes curl up with pleasure". She is not, she continues, "some old lady who sits at home sifting through her yellowing clippings". She's never kept clippings, as it happens. Although, with *Marlene* being what it is, she might want to start now.

Her second marriage limped on for 11 years until her husband came back from a trip to America and said he'd met someone else. "He wanted to discuss the situation. But I said: 'Just get me out of this equation. Now. And if you can be gone by bedtime, all the better.'"

Photograph: Edward Webb

My mother actually warned me against marriage: 'Sian, if you want a career, have a career, but don't try to have anything else'

that she regrets it. "It's waterproof and can stay out all year, although I do take it down in the winter."

The therapy, she adds, has helped enormously. She can get to the supermarket check-out and say: "Hang on. Is that French mustard? I meant to get German. Please could you get someone to change it for me?" She can do this even though, she exclaims proudly, "there are 20 people in the queue behind me". And these things have changed her life? Yes, absolutely, she insists. "I've learnt I can disagree with people. I've learnt I don't always have to be adorable."

As a child, she always felt she did have to be adorable. An older sister having died before she was born, and no siblings arriving afterwards, she knew she meant every thing to her parents.

Her mother, Sally, was a teacher who had to give up teaching when she married,

said: "Now you have another chance. Don't marry again." When Sian did, she refused to attend the wedding.

Sian grew up in a remote Welsh stone farmhouse near the Black Mountains, where her family had been hill farmers for generations. It was a plain-living, high-thinking sort of household and she was precociously clever. She had read all of Dickens, Trollope and Shakespeare well before she was 10. When she sat her 11-plus, she got 0 per cent for maths but 100 per cent for English. "I wrote about usury in medieval times, with reference to *The Merchant of Venice*." She got into grammar school on the strength of it.

However, she'd wanted to be an actress since she was six and her grandmother took her to a pantomime in Swansea. "It was the first time either of us had been to the theatre and we thought it wonderful. My

Don't pension off feminism now, young woman

The spirit of the suffragettes may have waned in the Nineties, but equal rights are still a mirage, says Julia Brosnan

Early one morning recently, six old ladies dressed up as suffragettes chained themselves to the railings outside Manchester town hall in protest against their meagre pensions. I went along, notebook in hand, bearing the assuredly temporary concern of one who is several decades short of retirement. My main aim was to congratulate them on their magnificent publicity stunt (long dresses, funny hats, menacing chain collection, and all over 70), so it was a surprise to find myself thrust upon a journey into the meaning and purpose of pre-millennial feminism. After all, they'd only donned a few pinafores.

Let me rewind a few years. I grew up when girls were women and the local consciousness-raising group expelled anyone who got it wrong. Life in the late Seventies/early

Eighties was something of a fore-runner to Mrs Merton - one long heated debate. Not about the pros and cons of feminism (we were sorted on the fact that patriarchy was the problem) but the minutiae of particular strains.

Then a new Eighties generation arrived, including many who would have been expelled from a whole range of groups but for the fact they had no interest in joining. By the time the Nineties got going, everyone was a girl decked out in industrial-strength lipstick and reinforced bras. Meanwhile the anti-feminist backlash kicked in. The men's movement claimed society was overrun with feminists (witness all the High Court judges, MPs, etc) and women-only car parks. (Where are they? Has anyone ever seen one?) And post-feminism came up with

the original idea of putting down women in favour of men. Both have been deconstructed by a new generation of feminists, the results of which look remarkably similar to what was going on round 25 years ago. But thinking you've seen it all before is but a sign of age - which brings me back to the railings.

"Do you know the story of the suffragettes?" asks Gertie, stalwart of several pensioners' action groups. "I give the sort of patronising 'Naturally' that I hope no one gives me when I hit the twilight zone. If they do, I'll punch them."

The ladies then dive into their own heated debate on the subject, and it dawns on me: I am completely ignorant. All I know is the cartoon-and-slogans version involving railings and "Votes for Women" badges. "The suffragettes fought to

improve the terrible working conditions of women who were often in low-paid, temporary, unsafe work, just as they are today," says Joan, president of the British Pensioners and Trade Unionists Association.

"The pensions issue is relevant because many women are still in non-pensionable jobs and need career breaks. This is why talks of private pensions is so worrying: many women of our generation couldn't even afford the full stamp and are now amongst the poorest in our society."

Hearing these pensioners talk about the brute facts of existence threw the anti-feminist backlash into even sharper relief. How can feminism be "finished" when many of the things that its forerunners fought for over 100 years ago haven't been achieved? And does anyone still care?

I went looking for some women in their early twenties to suss out their heated debates. I found Kat in the students union. Is she a feminist? "No, I'm not into dividing people up like that. I'm more post-gender and pansexual." Pardon? "I don't want to judge people according to their gender or sexuality."

Does it work in practice? Kat tells me that after living with a girl friend she flat-shared with someone who happened to be male. She was amazed. "It was horrible - he was everywhere. He took up so much space and he never did any housework." Didn't this change her views on feminism? "Oh no," she says. "I make a mental note to ask her again in five years' time."

Then I meet Beena. "I do believe in equality but I wouldn't call myself a feminist because of the taboo," she says. Really? "Oh yes - the media stereotype of a woman who's bitter and not getting on in life is very powerful. The word 'feminist' ties a noose around your neck, although I do think the media handle women's issues very unfairly - they're in the dark ages." Did she discuss this at college?

"No, the word 'feminist' never came up - not in the three years I was there." I find this a bit incredible. "Students were more concerned about paying off their loans. And being Asian, race was a bigger issue for me." Like Kat, she isn't sure whether she'll vote: "I haven't ever voted. I've lost faith; I don't think things will change."

Feeling about 105, I bump into Jo, who turns out to be a modern-day suffragette. "I'm proud to call myself a feminist. As a young

women with a career, I think we should have equal opportunities (which we haven't at the moment) and I also think that young working-class women with babies should be integrated back into the education system and given a chance."

Do many of her friends share her views? "Oh yes. I became a feminist at 16 through a group of strong friends at school (a girls' grammar) and a teacher who taught women's history. I did a project on the suffragettes and I'm very proud of what they did - that's one of the reasons I will always use my vote."

In her world, at least, things seem to have come full circle. Jo, who is also well up on the whole "post" thing (modern, gender, feminism etc), tells me that Camille Paglia is absurd. I tend to agree. After all, what has she ever said about Serps?

the leader page

Schools thinking stuck in the shallows

A grammar school in every town, oh yes! If that is the Conservative's big idea for the last full week of the election campaign, then John Major deserves the apathy which greets the prospect of his slide from office. As a slogan, it is an insult to the art of paraphrase. What it means is a selective school in every town, if that is what parents want, which most parents do not. As a policy, it is an insult to the intelligence of the voter.

The announcement that Mr Major will make today is a piece of mere symbolism. It is designed to appeal to the widely felt and genuine, but shallow, yearning for a time when the UK could boast at least some good state schools. They were called grammar schools, and many of them were replaced by comprehensive schools which were not as good. But that yearning is like a collective daydream, and it only takes the gentlest of nudges for the nation to stop, think and remember the unfairness of secondary moderns and the 11-plus, and the many very good comprehensive schools that exist today.

The Conservatives know this, of course. It was Tory councils in the 1980s that tried to bring back the selective system in their areas, only to be defeated by parent revolts. Most parents recognised that if a minority of children were chosen, then their precious children faced the risk of not being chosen, and decided it was not a risk worth taking.

The Prime Minister is driven by several impulses, which would seem not to include his own experience of school at Rutlish Grammar in the outer London suburbs, a school he thought unbearably snobbish. One is the market-research ideology in modern politics, which puts education at the top of the list and assumes that superficial nostalgia for grammar schools must form the basis of policy. Another is the ideological tendency of the Conservative party, wedded to the principle of selection in the teeth of opposition from parents. Having failed to return to selection through Tory education authorities, they have gone for the piecemeal approach. This is more likely to succeed, because selection (that is, choice by schools) is the logical corollary of choice by parents, and parental choice has, in the absence of a real education policy, been the theme song of successive Conservative education ministers.

Unfortunately for Mr Major, the fantasy of parental choice has even less hold on parents than the reverie of past grammar-school glory. Most parents have experienced the difference between the "right to express a choice" and the ability to make a choice in practice. Popular schools are difficult to get into and, as *The Independent* reported last week, parents resort to all kinds of devices to try to break into shrinking catchment areas. What is surprising about the present state of English and Welsh schools is that more have not

resorted to academic selection as a way of restricting their intake.

Mr Major's plans will do nothing to encourage more schools to become selective. It borders on the bizarre to suppose that parents of children at a successful comprehensive school will vote for it to become selective. Some will have younger children who they hope will go there under the siblings rule, who might be excluded by an exam. Most of the rest will say, Why should we? The only schools where parents may vote for (partial) selection are those like Archbishop Tenison near Brixton, where the Prime Minister comes from, which now

selects part of its intake in an effort to raise its low academic standing.

David Blunkett, more and more likely to be the keystone of a Blair government as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, is right to observe that none of this is relevant to the real challenges faced by our education system. But the Labour party's education policy cannot be marked better than "satisfactory". It too is in thrall to the market-research tendency in politics. Uniforms are believed to be popular, so we'll have them. Discipline? Oh, very much so. Computers? Dead modern. And all plugged into the

Internet thingy. What is important, though, is Mr Blunkett's restless search for ways to raise school standards across the board — set against this government's obsession with administrative structures.

It is this restlessness that highlights the central weakness of Labour's case. If education is the "passion" of Messrs Blair, Brown and Blunkett, why will they not spend more on it? You do not need to be a Conservative Central Office researcher, picking holes in the claimed savings from abolishing the Assisted Places Scheme, to regard the sums of money involved as trivial. Of course, smaller infant class sizes are a good start. And, yes, this newspaper has grudgingly accepted that a Labour government would put more money into education over a five-year period. But if Labour's rhetoric of a "world-class education system" is not to sound hollow there needs to be a more serious commitment of resources.

There is something not quite right about Labour's promise to spend £3bn or more from the windfall levy on privatised utilities on what many people will see as "schemes" for the young and long-term unemployed. The argument, no doubt, is that resources have to be devoted to getting down the social security bill to free resources for education. But unemployment is falling anyway, and surely Labour could have stolen some of the Liberal Democrats' best clothes by promising more money for

schools. (From a tax which, because it is already discounted by City markets, is the closest thing to a free lunch.)

But perhaps there is a more fundamental deception at the heart of the education debate. Perhaps politicians pretend that education is the first, second and third priority of modern statecraft because we, parents and non-parents, pretend that this is what we want. In which case, we ought to be honest with ourselves before demanding total commitment from elected representatives.

Heseltine draws blood



The Independent said what it thought of the Blair-As-Kohl-Puppet advertisement last week. Demeaning. But that was before we saw the original, by Michael Heseltine, upon which it was based. Altogether sharper, funnier and even rather well drawn. There's one Cabinet minister who might get a job outside politics.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Independent schools seek Blair pledge

Sir: The primacy of education as an election issue gives us the opportunity to highlight the uncertainty surrounding Labour's plans for the charitable status of independent schools.

In an interview on Sky TV last week, Tony Blair stated that "...parents have the right to choose private education if they want to... My poor old daddy worked like mad to put me through it... that was his choice and I got a very good education". To help Tony get his "very good education", the Blairs received help from Fettes College with the school fees. The school was able to do this thanks to its charitable status. The relief from business rates this brings enables independent schools to offer generous scholarships and bursaries, and extend access to some of the country's best schools to those who would otherwise struggle with fees.

Education has been established in law as a charitable activity since 1601 and only non-profit-making schools have charitable status. Any surplus money is put back into the school so that more children can benefit. In 1995-6, schools gave away in scholarships and bursaries twice the amount they gained from charitable status. For every £1 in benefit gained, they give away £2 helping children with fees.

If charitable status were removed, there would be far fewer scholarships or bursaries, fees would rise and schools would be forced to become more exclusive.

In its manifesto, Labour says that it "...will never force the abolition of good schools whether in the private or state sector... We wish to build bridges wherever we can across education divides." Can it give a commitment, therefore, that charitable status will not be challenged by a Labour government?

SIR BENJAMIN
Chairman, Society of Headmasters and Headmistresses of Independent Schools
HUGH DAVIES JONES
Chairman, Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools
JACQUELINE LANG
President, Girls' Schools Association
MICHAEL MAJOR
Chairman, Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
PAUL SPENDLOVE
Chairman, Independent Schools Association
London SW1

Major's free vote mystery

Sir: Mr Major has said Tory backbenchers will have an unhitched vote on Europe. Unfortunately he has not made clear what it will be about. If the vote in Parliament is on holding a referendum, Eurosceptics may succeed in stopping ordinary voters from deciding on the Eurocurrency. The only other option is on the Government's recommendation to voters in a referendum. If the Government lost that vote they surely would have to resign.

I question Mr Major's assertion that a free vote for his backbenchers can be compared to the ordinary voters' freedom of



choice at a referendum. I would be grateful for an explanation.
AJ TERRY
Bristol

Sir: The electorate's understanding of Europe is already woeful, but John Nais's statement (letter, 17 April) that "there is no prospect of the EU permitting member states to adopt the green policies essential for a sustainable future" is one of the most foolish I have ever heard.

The EU represents a framework within which 15 nation states can agree policies for their people's good. For example, aided by the Commission, the nation states have agreed to reduce pollution of our coastal waters and improve emission standards of vehicles. Currently the Commission is urging the nation states to reduce catches to sustain fish stocks — a "green" objective that the UK is threatening to oppose!

We must rid ourselves of the notion that the EU is some kind of foreign power. Sustainability is more likely working in partnership than in isolation.
RICHARD BALMER
Solihull, West Midlands

Sir: What better illustration of Eurosceptic ignorance than Robert Readman's reference (letters, 18 April) to "laws passed by an unelected body of fat cats in Brussels"?

EU law is made by ministers of the member states' elected governments, meeting (admittedly, usually in Brussels) in the Council. Yes, the Commission can propose, and yes, the Commission drafts — but so does Whitehall.
STEPHEN PALFREY
Brenford, Middlessex

Sir: As a pro-Common Marketeer, but definitely Eurosceptic, it is not an "irrational feeling of fear and anger" (Letters, 18 April) that worries me. It is a very rational fear, the reasons for which are firmly enshrined in the Maastricht treaty.

A single currency has far-reaching, irrevocable implications for Britain's future control of her own affairs, in respect of being at the dictum of the majority of member states.

At a time when Eastern Europe has been busy dismantling the rigid and stifling bureaucracy of a super-state, is not irrational for Western Europe to be hell-bent on creating its own?
BERNARD JUBY
Birmingham

Sir: A few days ago, an immaculate and polite Tory canvasser turned up our doorstep to ask if we were planning to vote, in our irrevocably Tory constituency, for the new, irrevocably Eurosceptic Tory candidate. We began gently to express our disillusionment with the Tory record in general, including the party's stance on Europe.

"Oh, I suppose you must be a businessman..." replied the lady, sadly. So much for the party's perception of the loyalty of its own power-base. Are the xenophobes and the blimps the only Tory supporters left, I wonder?
PAUL HICKMAN
Lymington, Hampshire

Nurses remodel health service

Sir: The reduction of junior doctors' working hours and the inevitable changes in working practices (letter, 21 March) should be seen by other health professionals as an exciting opportunity to improve patient care.

The "Expansion of the Nurse's Role" initiative has allowed nurses to undertake many roles traditionally performed by medical staff. The "nurse practitioner" however should not be seen as a mere replacement for a junior doctor. The greatest benefit from this role change is in the quality of care that can now be offered to the patients and their families. Nurses tend to stay in post for longer than a six-month rotation, which allows them to build up greater skills and competence. Experienced nurses who understand the needs of their patients can offer more flexibility and continuity of care than the more task-oriented doctors.

In our children's emergency and investigation unit all members of the nursing team are empowered to expand their role. The funding made available from reduction of junior doctors' hours has been used to employ extra staff to support the additional roles rather than to employ a "nurse practitioner" to replace a junior doctor. This initiative has reduced waiting times and time spent in hospital and has improved continuity and quality of care. The nurses have also derived

greater job satisfaction from the autonomous and holistic patient care and the medical staff now have more time to care for those children who require their special skills.
LYNN STOKOE
Ward Manager, Children's Day Unit (Ward 5)
Royal Victoria Infirmary
Newcastle upon Tyne

Dishonouring museum bequests

Sir: David Lister fails to put the question of fidelity to donors' conditions in its proper context ("When treasure becomes a burden", 16 April). From the beginning, and never more so than now, British and American museums have been built up on the basis that much of their resources would be provided by individuals rather than the public. To encourage their gifts, promises to honour the donors' conditions were made, unless those were unacceptable, in which case the gifts should have been declined. It is therefore dishonest to renege on that contract by trampling on the conditions once the donor is powerless to object.

There are two sorts of collector involved: those who collect with their own money and those, the museum directors, who collect with other people's. It is natural that they should sometimes have divergent ideas and that directors should have to have the last word, and to that end they invoke the

principle of "changing circumstances". Museums, however, exist in part to enshrine the past rather than to dress it up as the present. And the present offers no consensus on such topics as deaccessioning, entry charges, display and loans.
DR SELBY WHITTINGHAM
Secretary-General, Donor Watch
London SW5

Army marches on its tail

Sir: Christopher Bellamy's article "Britain sounds the retreat" (15 April) mentions "a critical mass below which you cannot go, a certain group of skills you must have to be a serious army". He then lists what he considers these to be, but omits the two groups without which any operation is doomed to fail: logistic and engineer support.

Who supplies the missiles for his attack helicopters? Who bridges gaps and breaches obstacle belts for his main battle tanks and armoured infantry? Throughout the history of high-intensity warfare, engineers and logisticians have proven vital to success. As our equipment becomes more advanced and maintenance-intensive, the role of the logistic tail can only become still more crucial. Furthermore, manoeuvrist doctrine relies heavily on both mobility for our troops, and counter-mobility to hinder the enemy: only the engineers are able to provide this support.

It is often said that amateurs think tactics whilst professionals think logistics.
A J BROWNIDGE
Major (Retd), Royal Engineers
Blackwater, Surrey

Blame people, not magpies

Sir: S G Armstrong's observations (letter, 19 April) are based on a garden hedgerow. The natural picture is very different.

In areas where there is sufficient habitat for nesting songbirds to conceal their nests in thick cover, the population increases and decreases of songbirds and magpies have been shown to rise and fall approximately in tandem. This has been determined from detailed British Trust for Ornithology surveys (C. Mead, BTO, Feb 1992).

The problem in a park or garden is that the habitat has been developed primarily to meet human requirements. Nesting habitats for songbirds are often not dense enough and nests can easily be found by magpies and other predators.

On shooting estates where magpie populations are controlled by the methods advocated by S G Armstrong, it is true that songbirds benefit from reduced predation, but songbirds on shooting estates also benefit from the abundance of habitats established and maintained for the game birds.

There are predators far worse than magpies: people who trim their hedges during spring and summer, thereby revealing nests to predators or causing nests to be deserted; cats and cars who each kill millions of birds a year.
GRAHAM GIDDINS
Lymington, Hampshire

Indian hemp in Africa

Sir: You report (17 April) that Nigeria's anti-narcotics agency (which must have better things to do given the incidence of Nigerian dealers and couriers in the international market) has charged the musician and nationalist Fela Anikulapolo Kuti with drug offences.

Nigeria has a military government. Two generations of soldiers have objected to the lyrics of some of his songs urging the army to march back to barracks. A different set of generals was in command in the late Seventies when he appeared in court accused of smoking "Indian hemp". I recall that on that occasion he declined even to answer the charge unless it was changed to "original African grass". They looked him up anyway.
EDWARD FOULNEY
London SE18

Tactical defeat

Sir: Vanessa Redgrave's intention to vote Liberal Democrat is more curious than you seem to suggest (report, 19 April). In her constituency of Brentford and Isleworth, she knows very well that the Liberal Democrat candidate cannot win. In 1992, the Lib Dems there gained a fraction over 10 per cent of the vote. By not voting Labour, she will actually be assisting the Conservatives. Is another spell of Conservative government what revolutionaries really want?

BRUCE KENT
Co-Chair, GROT Tactical Voting Campaign
London N1

Fifth Saint

Sir: The addition of Simon Dutton increases to five the number of actors who have portrayed the Saint (letter, 19 April).
ANTONIO D'ONOFRIO
London, SW7

On first seeing my new grandson

Paddy Ashdown

the commentators

On first seeing my new grandson

Paddy Ashdown reflects on war, peace and the millennium as he visits France for a family occasion

Last week, my first grandchild was born. This weekend, my wife and I escaped the election and went over to France to see our grandson for the first time. It was one of the happiest moments of our life.

Fifty-five years ago, the city where my daughter, her French husband and now my grandson live, was under German occupation. Looking at him, it was impossible not to think about the sort of world he will grow up in – the sort of Europe, in particular. Millions of men and women have died in Europe over the past century as our nations have waged war on each other. Reflecting on all that death and destruction, I prayed that, for my grandson, Europe's next century would be different. The European Union was born in the ashes of those wars when a new generation of statesmen set out to build a different future for our small, crowded continent.

You cannot go abroad and be unaware of the differences between European nations. But that diversity is one of Europe's great strengths. I do not want a European superstate in which those differences are crushed. But I do want sensible cooperation with our European partners to widen opportunities for the British people, and above all, to maintain peace in Europe.

Today, there is a paradox. On the one hand the benefits of our European membership are greater than ever. On the other hand, anti-European feeling in Britain is stronger, and relations with our partners more strained, than ever.

The benefits range from security to better environmental protection and regional development; from freer movement within Europe to new opportunities for individuals within Europe. The single market of 370 million consumers has created huge opportunities for British business. By working with our partners, we were able to open up new markets for British business in the last

'We must now address the obvious failings of Europe'

Gait round that would have been impossible had we been negotiating alone. In an increasingly global economy, working together with our European partners is the only way to promote Britain's national interests.

So given all the benefits, why the hostility to Europe? I believe there are four reasons. Pro-Europeans have been too quiet about the benefits of Europe. Instead of harnessing the natural majority in Parliament in favour of sensible European co-operation, John Major has tried – unsuccessfully – to appease the anti-Europeans in his own party. Too little has been done to address the obvious failings of the European Union. And British politicians have failed to take the British people with them.

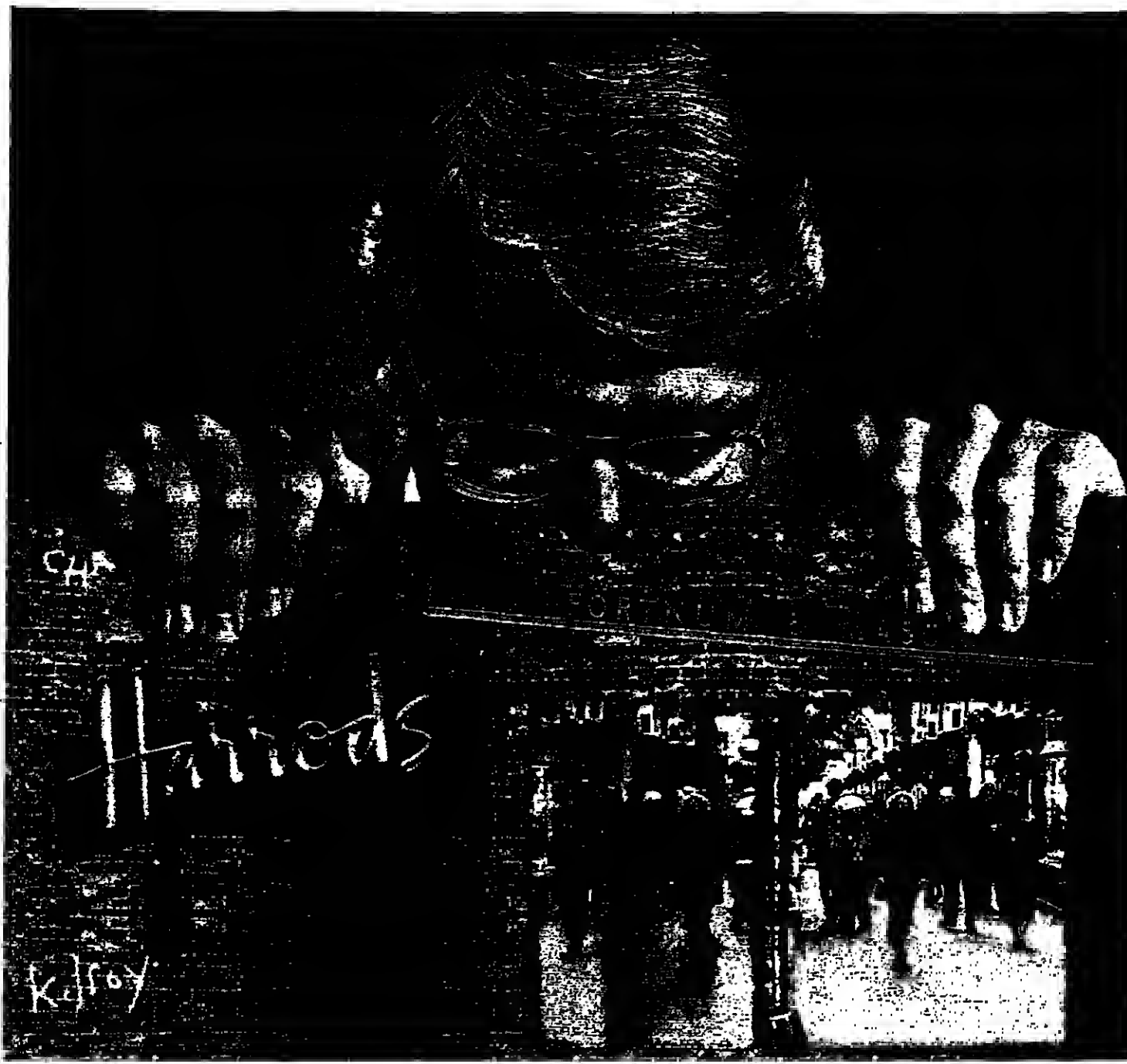
These failures of leadership mean that there is a massive job to be done to rebuild popular support for a sensible European policy. We need to concentrate on making the most of the practical benefits of European co-operation, especially for British businesses and British jobs, and we need to rebuild the key European alliances on which the effective promotion of our national interests depend.

We need also to reform the EU to make Europe work better. It must be decentralised, democratic and diverse; more open; less bossy and fussy. It must stay out of areas in which it does not need to be involved yet be stronger and more effective where it needs to be – for example, in enforcing the rules of the single market. Above all it needs to scrap and replace policies that are clearly failing, such as the Common Fisheries Policy.

Finally, we need to give people a real say in Europe's future, so that we can build a "People's Europe" instead of the "Politician's Europe" we have at the moment. That is why Liberal Democrats have long been committed to a referendum on any further constitutional change in our relations with Europe, including the single currency. When people talk about free votes, that is the free vote that really matters – the free vote of the British people.

I was one of the few MPs to support a referendum on the Maastricht treaty, back in 1991. At the time, John Major was totally opposed to such a referendum, as were most MPs in both other parties. But I believe that if we had had such a referendum, we would have been spared the shambles of the past five years.

Britain's national interests require strong leadership of a strong Britain in a strong Europe. That, in turn, requires popular support for any further constitutional change through a referendum. That is what the Liberal Democrats guarantee.



Wot, no Tories?

by Polly Toynbee

Outside the ranks of die-hard party activists, it is hard to find people who admit that they are going to vote Tory. I am suspicious; the cunning Conservative foxes have gone to earth. The only question now is how many Tories are lying? They are certainly lying low.

One suave and urbane Tory MP waved his hand in the air and said: "Wait and see, my dear. Come the day, they'll be there, creeping out of the woodwork. I mean, can you imagine anything more unfashionable than admitting you vote Tory now?" With a higher-than-usual number of Don't Knows and more waverers than ever, the Tories put all their hopes in a secret horde of Conservative voters too embarrassed to admit it.

I went on a Tory hunt, not so easy as you might think. Are they an endangered species or have they gone into hiding? Gone is the old Eighties triumphalism: to be Tory is to belong to an underground sect these days. I tried about 20 Home Counties golf clubs and country clubs, but they said No, thanks most awfully, but they didn't think their members would like to talk about their politics, a bit personal, a bit private. Sorry.

Someone suggested the Friends' coffee room at the Royal Academy, gathering place for the tweedy country set. But the country set up from Sussex and Hampshire turned out to be mainly decent sorts, who said they'd vote Lib Dem or Labour, apart from one old Tory buffer from Timbridge Wells too deaf to argue with. Maybe they were being foxy, but no one owned up to voting Tory.

Across the road in Fortnum & Mason, three Surrey matrons had just lunched at the soda fountain. Coiffed like cappuccinos, Chanel-suited, with Louis Vuitton and Gucci bags, surely they must be Tories? "No, I'm for the Referendum Party, absolutely." Why? "Because we don't want to be ruled by foreigners." (Like Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Gucci?) "I don't want Europe controlling our money, telling us what to do." As her two friends nod in agreement, I ask what they are going to vote? With a curious little sound in their throats they say they haven't decided yet. What did they vote last time? Well, Tory. So why aren't they sure this time? "Oh I do think John Major's such a sweet little weak man." Could they ever imagine voting Labour? "Um, pass. Well, maybe. Don't know." Those are classic foxy Conservative

votes. But if you are into Galliano and Armani, would you be seen dead wearing anything as unfashionable as public support for John Major?

Every seasoned canvasser will tell you there is a natural tendency among Tories to be reticent about their views: after all they have a lot to be reticent about. If someone on the doorstep says, "I'm afraid I prefer not to discuss my politics," you can always mark them down as a Tory. Now the foxes voters are saying, "Well actually, I'll make my mind up a bit nearer the time," but you can bet they are dyed-in-the-wool Conservatives, as are the "I'll read all the leaflets and then make up my mind."

What of the maddening women who say, "Oh, you'll have to talk to my husband about politics"? They are the ones whose only rebellious act in their lives is to sneak into the polling booth and place their X malevolently in the Tory box just to spite

'At the mention of John Major's name, most Conservatives seem to behave like St Peter when the cock crew'

their Labour-voting husbands: recent research shows more women vote Conservative and their husbands usually don't know it.

So, hunting for Tories in the richest places, I sauntered through the Burlington Arcade where three young sharp-suited City types were standing by a window full of pastel striped shirts. One, in a covered in coy little pigs, said: "Pui it this way. I've got a swinging great bet on Labour. Yes, but how will you vote? 'Ah, well, frankly I haven't quite made up my mind.' What you really might vote Labour? Faint snickering from his two friends. "Well, yes, actually, I might well," he said with a hint of bravado. Fat chance, they were Tories to a man.

Even in Harrods, in the splendour of the mighty food halls, hunting down self-confessed Tories was surprisingly difficult. "Oh I couldn't

say," said a tribly-hatted racing man queuing for smoked salmon beside the fish display. At the chocolate counter a lady buying five fat boxes said: "Vote Conservative? I really haven't thought about it yet."

Finally, at the *charcuterie* counter, triumph! There were two couples down from Tring for the day who all admitted they would vote Conservative. "But don't give our names, will you?" Why not? "Well, we wouldn't want everyone knowing our politics." Are you embarrassed by voting Conservative, then? "No, it's just not very nice to talk about." So why were they voting Conservative? Europe, smarmy Blair, union peril and general Labour untrustworthiness, they listed dutifully – good solid national-interest issues.

But what about tax? Here the conversation ignited: "Labour will tax us blue in the face as soon as they get in!" said the managing director of a contract cleaning company. "Remember being taxed till the pipes squeaked? Ninety bloody per cent top rate! It would be the same all over again!" His wife said: "We've talked about selling up and going abroad if it happens again." Can I quote you? "Not my name, no." Why not, are you ashamed? "People might take the wrong meaning." What would that be?

The other husband, also in the contract cleaning business, stepped in here. "Look here," he said, "I know where you're coming from. You want to make us look greedy and selfish, don't you?" Well, OK, so what does he think about the poor, the unemployed, the yawning gap the Tories created between people like us here in Harrods and people like them begging outside the door? "Don't give me that hogwash! I worked for everything I got and I deserve to keep it. I never had a silver spoon. I'm sick to death of the victims everywhere. I've got jobs I can't fill, so where are the so-called unemployed?" Cleaning contractors are not noted for generosity, and I was about to ask what he paid, but his wife pulled on his arm and said it was definitely time to move on, so much to do, nice meeting you and sorry to rush away. So off they went, rather hurriedly.

Sometimes it's hard to be a Tory. At the mention of John Major's name, most of them seem to behave like St Peter when the cock crew. Certain though Labour looks of winning, expect a sizeable army of Tories to sink back into their old habits, whatever they say or don't say in public now.

Selfish career takes off in the lavatory

I said the other day that nothing interesting had happened in the election so far. I take that back, after the episode of Mr Will Self taking heroin in the Prime Minister's aeroplane.

There was nothing particularly interesting in the idea of Mr Self taking heroin in the lavatory in the PM's private aeroplane, of course, as that took place in private. What is interesting is everyone's reactions to it. My own reaction is that it was very funny, given the contrast between the shocking act and the pompous facade of a Tory battle plane. But as Mr Self himself has said, he was hired to write for newspapers on the basis of his image as a sort of notorious drug-related trendy talent so it is rather cruel and unfair to be fired for exactly the same reason.

As he has also said, it is ironic to see the PM's plane awash in free alcohol and yet to have his own activities seen as something especially reprehensible, even though nobody on the plane was affected by what he was doing and it didn't affect his capacity to do his writing job. It reminded me of two things.

It reminded me first of a time when I was on a chartered plane to New York 20 years ago, carrying the cream and the dregs of Fleet Street's journalists as well as the hippy gang that wrote and edited *Oz*. Everyone in fact from Lunchtime

O'Booze to Richard Neville. We were all being flown free to America to review a new rock group called Brinsley Schwarz. The *Oz* crowd sat up front in the plane and looked cool. The tabloid mob sat at the back and looked seedy. In New York we all got out and did our own thing then got back in the plane home, at which time Richard Neville approached me and said: "I want you to remember this scene, Miles. There at the back are the gentlemen of the press who won't speak to us hippies because we are supposedly monsters of depravity and spend all our time smoking terrible things. Yet here we all are, sitting reading our novels and works of philosophy and puffing nothing worse than a Gauloise, while if you go and inspect the gentlemen of the press you will find they are slurping back all the alcohol they can get and feasting their nasty little eyes on all the full-frontal pornography you can't get in Britain which they have bought in New



Miles Kingston

York and will hide from their wives when they get home."

I went and had a look, and it was true. The second thing the Self episode reminded me of was a book by Quentin Crisp. Not the *Naked Civil Servant*, but his less famous follow-up, *How To Have A Lifestyle*. Everyone should read this book, or at least anyone who wants to bring a little real style into their life, as opposed to the fake style which comes with designer labels.

The best way of summing up Crisp's subversive message about creative artists is to repeat what he said about the failure of Henry Moore. If you saw a Henry Moore sculpture, said Crisp, you would recognise it instantly. But if Moore himself came into a gallery, *nobody would know who he was*. Therefore, even if he was a success as an artist, he was an utter failure as a stylist.

You don't have to swallow this whole to see the sense of what Crisp means. You can see why, for instance, although Salvador Dali was never the best of the surrealist painters, his personal public lifestyle meant he was always the most famous of them all.

So although Self might think now that he has dealt a blow to his career, I think that on the Crisp scale of things he has advanced solidly. His name and back are the gentlemen of the press who won't speak to us hippies because we are supposedly monsters of depravity and spend all our time smoking terrible things. Yet here we all are, sitting reading our novels and works of philosophy and puffing nothing worse than a Gauloise, while if you go and inspect the gentlemen of the press you will find they are slurping back all the alcohol they can get and feasting their nasty little eyes on all the full-frontal pornography you can't get in Britain which they have bought in New

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Starve the children and pay the debt

Let me put a face to the abstraction. It is that of Virgilina. The day I met her she had a cloth tied under her chin, fastened in a knot on the top of her head like an old-fashioned mumps victim. The only treatment she had for toothache was this one, which her ancestors had brought from Italy four generations before. She had no money for medicine.

She had no money for food for her children either. She and her husband lived with them on the roadside in Brazil. By a modern tarmac highway they lived in a hut made from sticks and black bin-liners. They lived off bruised fallen oranges gleaned from the plantations nearby, supplemented by a meagre charity hand-out and what few vegetables they could grow from cultivating the four-foot-wide roadside verge.

Once they had had land. But they had been evicted by a rancher; and his gunmen. The action was illegal, but the Brazilian government had not intervened or even objected. The rich man produced cash crops and Brazil needed cash to pay off its massive share of Third World Debt.

It is the face of Virgilina and her three children which lies behind the neutrality of terms like "international debt". Once Third World Debt was news. In the late Seventies, it threatened to send the world's banks crashing like a line of dominoes. But the international financial policy-makers and bankers found a way of juggling their risks so that it ceased to be a problem.

Only to the poorest people in the world – on to whose shoulders the burden has been transmitted – is Third World Debt still a pressing issue. To them it is still a chronic inhibition to development. For every £1 the poor nations get in aid from the West, they send us £3 in debt repayments. The money is raised by cuts in health, education and agricultural development budgets. Negotiating the mending complex rescheduling deals diverts the best brains in Third World administrations from more fundamental economic problems.

For the past decade the international community, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has told poor nations that debt

relief will come if they put their house in order with harsh economic structural adjustment programmes. Yet those which complied, such as Uganda and Bolivia, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast, are now finding that the goalposts are about to be moved.

Until recently things looked promising. The British government was consistently pushing for debt relief in international forums. The new president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, had come spectacularly on-side. The US government seemed convinced. Then, at a private seminar sponsored by Cardinal Hume in London last year, the head of the IMF, Michel Comdessus, a devout Catholic, showed every sign of having been converted to the cause. It seemed that the traditional opposition – from Japan, Germany and Italy – might be outflanked.

Then a new official arrived at the US Treasury and threw its policy into reverse. David Lipton, fresh from deals with Eastern Europe, decided that debt relief should be used as a lever for even further market reforms. Despite the fact that Bolivia

has pursued them for 13 years and Uganda for 10, it looks as though the decision will be made at the spring meetings of the Bank and the Fund in Washington this week to delay their relief for two years.

The consequences could be grave. It is not simply that the policy will run directly counter to that outlined in Uganda by Hillary Clinton last month when she said: "The economic and democratic transitions that are taking place now in Africa will succeed only if African children are educated." The added interest payments Uganda will pay over the extra two years would provide primary education for four children in each family.

As well as having a negative impact on their standing in markets, the change could undermine the work of Third World leaders who have pushed for reform, playing into the hands of intemperate opponents. If the compliant nations are to be made to wait, what of Ethiopia and the rest? Across the globe a billion poor people like Virgilina will pay the price.

Paul Vallely

obituaries / gazette

Sir Harry Nicholas

The Labour Party just cannot ignore its past links with the Transport and General Workers Union. The use of Milbank Tower as their general election campaign headquarters is a reminder that Frank Cousins, the General Secretary of the TGWU 1955-69, located his office there when he became Minister of Technology in the 1964 Labour Government. Harry Nicholas became Acting General Secretary of the union while Cousins served in the government. The responsibility of leading the union stretched over a two-year period. Nicholas carried it out with distinction.

When Cousins resigned from Harold Wilson's government, because of his opposition to the Prices and Incomes Bill proposed by George Brown, the Minister for Economic Affairs, he returned to his union post and membership of the TUC General Council. In the reshuffling of union positions which followed, Nicholas took over the seat he had occupied on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party. From 1960 to 1964 he had served as Treasurer of the party; for old Labour this had been most important because of its dependence on union financial support.

With this background it was not entirely surprising that his name should appear in the frame to fill the vacancy for a new General Secretary of the party in 1968. Nicholas was well known and highly regarded by influential people like Jim Callaghan and George Brown. His age may have counted against it – he was then just over 60 – but this also meant that he was able to take early retirement from the union, ensuring his pension whilst enabling him to take the Labour Party post.

Harold Wilson claimed in his book *The Labour Government*

1964-70 (1971) that, contrary to widely held opinion, it was he who initially suggested Harry Nicholas for the post. It was thought at the time, by Wilson and others, that Nicholas might be unwilling to take it up, so other trade union leaders were approached but without avail. Wilson wrote that two names emerged: Tony Greenwood and Harry Nicholas. Greenwood was a government minister, and Wilson wanted him to remain in that capacity and not run for the post. Despite this, Wilson claimed, a story was leaked to the press that he had demanded support for Greenwood and had been rebuffed. He wrote: "A great press legend ran for weeks on the subject, and was taken by the Conservative press as conclusive proof that I had lost any grip I had ever had on the party."

Wilson's claim that the story was totally untrue was affirmed by the Labour Party NEC in an approved statement released at the time. I was close to affairs in the Labour Party personally and believe Wilson's version but I do not doubt that much of the mischief had something to do with George Brown.

Raising money was a major concern at the time and probably was not unrelated to Nicholas's appointment. Certainly it became his main preoccupation immediately after his selection. His approach for financial aid to union leaders whom he knew brought results. He also conceived the idea of persuading Labour Party members and friends to donate £5 to a finance-raising effort. He called it the "fighting fivers campaign". His campaigning was good and emphasised that there were few millionaires around the Labour Party then.

He worked hard, although facing criticism from some quarters which he found diffi-



Nicholas between Jim Callaghan (left) and George Brown (right) at the Labour Party Conference, 1968.

Photograph: Hulton Getty

cult to accept. Despite these endeavours, Nicholas got some of the blame for Labour's disastrous loss in the 1970 election. But other factors beyond his control were the main cause, not least Ted Heath's successful line of bringing prices down "at a stroke" and Harold Wilson's lacklustre performance, plus the over-tight budget of Roy Jenkins. Even football entered into it – with England's defeat in the World Cup.

The son of an Avonmouth docker, Nicholas's first job was as a clerk in the port of Bristol. From 1936 until his move to the secretaryship of the Labour Party he was employed in the full-time service of the TGWU and operated as a national officer from 1940 onwards in the road haulage, chemicals and engineering industries. He justifiably earned a reputation for meticulous presentation at industrial conferences and arbitration proceedings – I remember well an occasion during the Second

World War when Nicholas was highly complimented by a judge who presided over the National Arbitration Tribunal for a submission he had made, much to the resentment of colleagues present from another major union.

We both had a high regard for Ernest Bevin but had differences over policies adopted by the late Arthur Deakin when the latter was General Secretary of the TGWU (1946-55). Nicholas managed however to avoid the wrath of many of Deakin's opponents (including myself) by his courteous and friendly nature. But there was no doubting his conformity with Deakin's ultra-right wing approach, especially so within the confederation of shipbuilding and engineering unions. He found it difficult nevertheless to apply Deakin's authoritarian stance in dealing with members in dispute and the shop stewards in the various industries. His smooth, polished nature helped to avoid

too much trouble but he did not fit in easily to the rough and tough problems of the shop floor. In trade union circles generally, he was renowned for smart, debonair appearance, invariably wearing an Anthony Eden hat and nice clothes. One newspaper reporter during the automation strikes in the West Midlands during the 1950s mistook him for a Scotland Yard detective.

As union policies changed in the latter years of his service Nicholas moved slightly to the left. On one occasion, in response to press criticism about his change of approach to TUC policy, he said he was merely carrying out decisions made by the 39 lay member-executive of the union, with which he was agreed.

Towards the end of Nicholas's period as acting General Secretary of the TGWU a decision was made by the TUC to sell the full rights of the old *Daily Herald* to the Mirror Group. The TGWU had dis-

tributed 200,000 leaflets and used publicity in its journal to try to increase the circulation of the *Herald* to prevent its demise, but without success. Nicholas reported: "It is to be hoped that the new newspaper, the *Sun*, will make some contribution to the wider interest of the trade union and Labour movement."

Jack Jones

Herbert Richard Nicholas, trade unionist: born Bristol 13 March 1905; Clerk, Port of Bristol Authority 1919-36; District Officer, Gloucester, Transport and General Workers Union 1936-38; Regional Officer, Bristol 1938-40; National Officer, London 1940-56; Assistant General Secretary 1956-68; Acting General Secretary 1964-66; OBE 1949; Member, National Executive Committee, Labour Party 1956-64, 1967-68; Treasurer 1960-64, General Secretary 1968-72; Member, TUC General Council, 1964-67; Kl 1970; married 1932 Rosina Brown (deceased); died 15 April 1997.

Zdenek Mlynar

Nearly 20 years before Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on his ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to reform the Soviet system, Zdenek Mlynar, one of his friends from his student days in Moscow, had tried to introduce similar policies when he was a member of the Czechoslovak Communist leadership that presided over the Prague Spring of 1968.

Mlynar was a close associate of Alexander Dubcek, the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ), whose short-lived experiment to launch "socialism with a human face" was brought to an abrupt end by the Soviet-led military invasion in August 1968. As the top intellectual in the CPCZ leadership, Mlynar was in many ways the brains behind the charismatic Dubcek. Their fate – and that of the Prague Spring – was sealed by the fact that the Czechoslovak reforms were being shaped at a time when the Soviet empire was reaching its most expansionist phase; and that the Kremlin's incumbent at the time was not Mikhail Gorbachev but Leonid Brezhnev who had zero tolerance towards more liberal forms of Communism.

Born in Vysoké Myto, in eastern Bohemia, in 1930, Mlynar joined the CPCZ at the age of 16 and worked for the party's youth wing after secondary school. Like many other talented and hard-working Communists of his generation, he was sent to the Soviet Union to complete his education. Between 1951 and 1955 he studied at the law faculty of Moscow's Lomonosov University where he and Gorbachev became, in Mlynar's words, "a pair of close friends".

A year after his return to Prague, Mlynar joined the Institute for State and Law of the Academy of Sciences. In the mid-1960s, as the long winter of Communist orthodoxy was beginning to be assailed by the first harbingers of the Prague Spring, Mlynar became a senior official in the CPCZ's legal affairs department. The economic downturn in the early 1960s and the failure of Antonin Novotny, the long-standing CPCZ leader, to follow the de-Stalinisation programmes of some of his Communist neighbours, had fuelled widespread discontent which, in turn, prompted growing demands for change within and outside the party.

It was in these conditions that in 1967 Mlynar became head of an inter-disciplinary research team whose task was to work on the development of democracy in the Communist system. This provided the theoretical foundations for the Dubcek leadership's famous Action Programme of April 1968, a substantial part of which was written or inspired by Mlynar. Dubcek had become the CPCZ's leader in January 1968, and within weeks Czechoslovakia was embarking on a new path which brought the end of censorship, the re-emergence of non-Communist organisations and the promise of far-reaching market-oriented economic reforms. Mlynar was already an influential figure; as the pace of change accelerated, he was promoted in June to become one of the secretaries of the CPCZ's Central Committee which, at the age of 38, made him the youngest member of the leadership.

Mlynar, like Dubcek and many other reformers, believed that the Kremlin would allow them to carry out their reforms as long as they assured the Soviet leadership of their loyalty to Moscow, stayed within the Soviet bloc and prevented the re-establishment of viable non-Communist parties. That turned out to be somewhat naive assumption – the more so because as Mlynar was to recall in *Nightfall in Prague* (1980), his insider's account of the events of 1968, Janos Kadar, the Hungarian leader, had warned Dubcek of the dangers ahead

represented by Brezhnev, asking rhetorically whether Dubcek realized who he was dealing with. The Soviet-led invasion on 21 August put an end to the Czechoslovak experiment with humane socialism.

Mlynar was with the rest of the Czechoslovak leadership that was kidnapped by the invaders and whose members were forced to negotiate under duress in Moscow to give their qualified blessing to the Soviet military presence in the country. He was then elected to the CPCZ's decision-making Presidium (Politburo) at the party's secret Congress held under the noses of the invading troops in a factory in the Prague suburb of Visocany.

But as the Soviet military presence weakened the reformers, Mlynar resigned his posts just three months after the invasion. In 1970 he was expelled from the CPCZ and was sacked from his job at the Academy. For the next seven years he worked in the entomology department of the National Museum. This was not the only punishment he suffered; Vladimir, his son, was barred from going to university and worked as a hospital orderly.

Mlynar became one of the first signatories of Charter 77, the dissident human rights movement, when it was estab-



Mlynar: nightfall in Prague

lished in January 1977. But a few months later Mlynar and his second wife, Irena Dubska, were allowed to leave the country and they settled in Austria. He taught politics at Innsbruck University and became a much-quoted commentator on Soviet-bloc affairs, particularly after Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power. Following the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, there were rumours that Gorbachev's reform-minded KGB and their Czechoslovak collaborators had plotted to install Mlynar as the leader of a revamped CPCZ to prevent the complete collapse of communism. Mlynar always denied these somewhat far-fetched allegations for which no conclusive evidence has ever come to light.

In the 1990s Mlynar divided his time between Austria and Prague where he became active in Czech politics and was elected honorary chairman of the Left Bloc – a small group of reform Communists who occupy the ground between the Communist Party and the Social Democrats. He stood for parliament in last year's elections in which the Left Bloc failed to secure a single seat. As a Communist reformer of the 1968 generation, Mlynar was intensely critical of the all-out drive towards a largely unregulated market economy that followed the Velvet Revolution.

He stayed loyal to many of the ideals of the Prague Spring – an attitude that was largely out of step with Czech thinking in the 1990s.

Gabriel Partos

Zdenek Mlynar, Communist reformer, dissident and political scientist: born Vysoké Myto, Bohemia 22 June 1930; on staff of the Institute for State and Law of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences 1956-70; Secretary of CPCZ Central Committee, member of Presidium 1968; married first Irena Budinova (one son), second Irena Dubska; died Vienna 15 April 1997.

Line Vautrin

Line Vautrin's ravishing costume jewels and sculpted objects are the epitome of Parisian Neo-Romanticism.

Made largely in the Forties and Fifties, of resins, glass and bronze, Vautrin's creations do not belong to any of the traditional genres of jewellery, even of "costume jewellery". They are little miracles of inventiveness, of subtle skill and endless experimentation; delight in materials allied to a love of the primitive, of repeated motifs, patterns and elements recalling ancient inscribed tablets, hieroglyphics and pictographs.

Born in 1913 into a family of metal founders, even as a small child Line was fascinated by her father's business. She never received a formal art education, but by the time she was 14 had mastered some of the skills of casting, chasing and gilding. At 15 she hit upon the idea, then quite novel, of making artistic costume jewellery in gilt metal. Almost straightaway she began to sell pieces, sending out her bills under her father's letterhead because she was legally still too young to be in business.

Her only working experience was four days at the house of Schiaparelli and a few weeks as a representative for a firm of industrial photographers, after which she decided to be her own boss. She started off with a few simple bracelets – "like big napkin rings". As she wrote: "I put a few pieces together in a little suitcase, and set out with some trepidation as a door-to-door saleswoman in Paris... I was not yet 21."

She devoted herself to experimentation, alone in a little room, trying out different materials (which already included resins), but with her heart set on

gilt bronze – something hitherto unheard of, and considered provocative, in bad taste. The turning-point came when she hired a stand at the Paris International Exposition of 1937, and attracted a sufficient clientele to be able to open a shop in the Rue de Berni so tiny she called it "the cupboard".

Wartime, with its longing for fantasy and ornament, ensured her breakthrough, and her gilt buttons made her name. Ahead of her lay two decades of frenzied activity, of ceaseless invention, of relish for "frivolity" in all its forms – from house slippers to umbrella handles, from powder compacts to necklaces. She became the "poet of metal".

In 1943 she opened an exquisite small boutique on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, near the Elysée Palace; her huttons filled her windows. Over the entrance stood a statue of St Eligius, the patron saint of goldsmiths. The same year she opened a theatrical atelier in the Marais where her objects were actually created. The former Hôtel Mège de Sérilly was a vast 26-room building in the Rue Vieille du Temple which had formerly belonged to Louis XVI's Paymaster-General.

Vautrin was a pioneer in the rediscovery of the Marais (later to be restored at the instigation of André Malraux). Her workshop was hailed as a model social enterprise: its staff of 50 or so employees was provided with common rooms for relaxation, a library and a refectory on the top floor, as well as the novel possibility of working part-time from home, free from the constraints of the workshop.

These years in the Fifties were perhaps Vautrin's most

productive. In addition to buttons, brooches and buckles she also produced big, barbaric necklaces influenced by her research into ancient goldsmiths' work in the archaeological museums of Cairo and on the island of Crete. With time, her artistic pretensions grew. Many of her more serious, larger pieces bore inscriptions such as lines from her favourite poets, Dante or Prévert and the neo-romantics. Important jewels and her popular powder compacts and boxes were given complex mythological symbols or one of those visual riddles called a rebus, so beloved of medieval craftsmen. Like works of art, she gave her pieces titles.

She conceived the idea of buttons made of blown glass containing tiny ships, buttons serving as scent bottles; since there was little mother-of-pearl or synthetic ivory to be had in 1946, why not buttons made of ceramic? She produced hundreds of clips, brooches, bracelets and boxes – among them brooches called *Petit Poucet* ("Tom Thumb"), *Oiseau volant* ("Bird in Flight"), boxes entitled *Empreintes digitales* ("Fingerprints"), and *Ammonite*.

In the early 1960s higher rents and restlessness led Vautrin to leave the Marais. She threw herself into the new technique she had patented, based on synthetic resin, which was then encrusted with little pieces of coloured mirror-glass. She set up on the Rue de l'Université where she stayed for several years, also opening a branch in Morocco. She had become increasingly interested in decoration and began to make convex looking-glasses with elaborate faceted and encrust-

ed frames. She called these confections her "witches". One of the first to buy a "witch" was her friend Françoise Sagan. Ingrid Bergman and Yul Brynner soon followed and – the fashionable seal of approval – Brigitte Bardot.

After she turned 50 she became fed up with the business and its pressing obligations, so gave up manufacturing and selling and turned instead to teaching, spending the next decade showing a succession of students how to handle and design with resins, and travelling around France as the spirit moved her. In 1980 she accidentally discovered a new kind of object – "pellimorphoses" – almost intangible wraiths of coloured resin in which there swarmed a host of chimeras, dragons or birds.

The sale of her jewellery at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris in 1986, led to her discovery by the London art dealer David Gill, who began to show her work in London, New York, Tokyo (with Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons) and other places outside France, while Naïla de Montbrison gave exhibitions in Paris. Two books about her work, *Line Vautrin* (Thames & Hudson, 1992) and *Rebus* (Le Promeneur, 1994) followed.

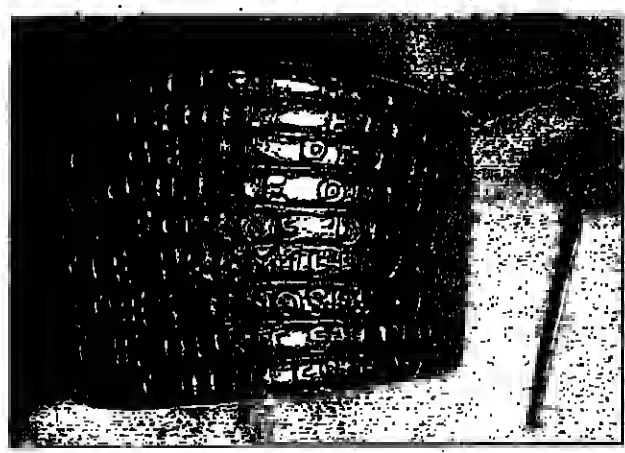
Line Vautrin herself was small, dark, sharp, lively and witty – the incarnation of the ideal Parisienne for whom her creations were designed.

Patrick Maurières

Line Vautrin, jewellery maker and decorative artist: born Paris 28 April 1913; married Jacques Armand Bonnard (marriage dissolved; one daughter); died Paris 12 April 1997.



Poet of metal: Vautrin (above) and examples of her jewellery



Line Vautrin, jewellery maker and decorative artist: born Paris 28 April 1913; married Jacques Armand Bonnard (marriage dissolved; one daughter); died Paris 12 April 1997.

The following notes of judgments were prepared by the reporters of the *All England Reports*.

Capital gains tax. Garner (Inspector of Taxes) v. Pounds Shipowners and Shipbrokers Ltd; ChD (Caraway JJ) 21 Feb 1997. For capital gains tax purposes, the cost of obtaining release from restrictive covenants incurred after the date of an agreement for an option for the sale of land was deductible in computing a gain accruing on the sale of the option. In identifying the consideration received for the option, the sum necessary to obtain the release was to be taken into account, even though at the time of the option agreement the expenditure had not yet been incurred and the amount had not been ascertained. The consideration received by the taxpayers was the agreed option price less the amount needed to obtain it.

Michael Parnes (IR Solicitor) for the Crown; David Bunt (Warner Goodman & Street, Farnham) for the taxpayers.

Bestock v Rotham (HMV); ChD (Sir John Vinelott) 20 March 1997. The surplus value of the price paid by an enterprise zone syndicate for an industrial building, after the construction costs and the price paid for the land on which the industrial building stood had been subtracted, was to be apportioned in accordance with the formula contained in s 42(2) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 in order to calculate the land value for the purposes of capital allowances under s 10(B) of the Capital Allowances Act 1990.

John Walters (Edwin Cox for Halliwell Landau) for the plaintiffs; Timothy Brennan (IR Solicitor) for the Crown.

Robert Smith QC, Bernard Gateshill (Registrar of Criminal Appeals) for the appellants; K Roger Keen QC and David Trenchard for the Crown.

Extradition. Re Al-Salam; QBD (Oliv CJ) (Auld LJ, Brian Smedley JJ) 11 April 1997.

Michael Ken QC (C & E) for the Crown; Roderick Cordan QC (Wells LJ) for the Appellant.

Crime. R v Beattie CA (Ct Div) (Rose LJ, Dyson and Timothy Walker JJ) 11 March 1997. The plea of *autrefois convict* was applicable only where the second indictment charged the same offence as the first indictment, although the trial judge had a discretion to stay the proceedings where the second offence arose out of substantially the same facts as the first. That discretion should be exercised in favour of an accused unless the prosecution established that there were special circumstances for not doing so.

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Announcements for Deaths. BIRTHS. MARRIAGES & CELEBRATIONS. (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 0171-293 2011 (24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2912) or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER GAZETTE announcements (notices, funerals, forthcoming marriages, Marriages) must be submitted in writing (or fax) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. They should be accompanied by a daytime telephone number.

Forthcoming marriages

Dr J. R. Bolton-Jones and Dr A. Selick. The engagement is announced between Robert, elder son of Dr and Mrs Michael Bolton-Jones, of Millgrove, Glasgow, and Alison, only daughter of Mr and Mrs Paul Selick, of Newbury, Berkshire.

Birthdays

The Queen, 71; Professor Gerald Benney, goldsmith and silversmith, 67; Mr Ian Bruce, Director-General, Royal National Institute for the Blind, 52; Sir George Burton, former chairman, Fisons, 81; Mr Laurence Ellis, former Rector, Edinburgh Academy, 65; Air Marshal Sir John Hunter-Jod, 80; Sir Robin Riba, chairman, Lloyds TSB, 71; Mr Bernard Latham, actor, 46; Mr John McCabe, composer and pianist, 58; Mr Tony Macaulay, composer, 53; Mr Ronald Magill, actor, 77; Dr Halldan Mathier, Emeritus Director-General, World Health Organisation, 74; Miss Angela Mortimer (Barrow), tennis player, 65; Mr John Mortimer QC, author and playwright, 74; Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former prime minister of New Zealand, 55; Mr Ben

Patterson, former MBE, 58; Mr Anthony Quinn, actor, 82; The Right Rev Donald Snelgrove, former Bishop of Suffragan of Hull, 72; Maj Gen Sir John Swinton, Lord-Lieutenant of Berwickshire, 72; Mr Srinivas Venkataraman, cricketer, 51.

Anniversaries

Births: Jan van Riebeeck, naval surgeon and founder of Cape Town, 1634; Prince George of Denmark, consort of Queen Anne, 1653; Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel, educationist, 1782; Reginald Heber, hymn-writer and bishop, 1783; Charlotte Brontë, novelist, 1816; Sir Herbert Atkinson Barker, surgeon, 1869.

Deaths: St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1109; Jean-Baptiste Racine, playwright, 1699; Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens), novelist, 1910; Baron Manfred von Richthofen, aviator, killed in action 1918; Marie Corelli (Mary Mackay), author, 1924; Eleonora Duse, actress, 1924; John Maynard Keynes, first Baron Keynes, economist, 1946; Sir Richard Stafford Cripps, lawyer, diplomat and statesman, 1952; Sara Margery Fry, social reformer, 1958; François Duvalier ("Papa Doc"), president of Haiti, 1971. On this day the City of Rome was founded (traditional date), 753 BC. Baber found-

ed the Mogul Empire in India, 1526; the Canadian North-West Mounted Police were established, 1873; the world's first jet-liner service was begun by BOAC, flying Concorde between London and Rome, 1952. Today is the Feast Day of St Anastasia of Antioch, St Anselm of Canterbury, St Berno, St Conrad of Parham, St Malrubius or Macrubha and St Simeon Barsabas and Others.

Lectures

Victoria and Albert Museum: Rosemary Miles, "Paints by Black Artists", 2.30pm. **Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, London EC1:** Professor John Pick, "Industry and the Arts: Bingo and the National Lottery. Prices and Cultural Values", 1pm.

Dinners

Movement Control Officers' Club. The annual Ladies Dinner of the Movement Control Officers' Club was held on Saturday evening in the Officers' Mess, Royal Logistics Corps Headquarters, Deepcut, Surrey. Colonel S.H. Spackman presided. Brigadier R.E. Rabbitt, Chief Executive, DTMC, and Mrs Rabbitt were the principal guests.

CASE SUMMARIES

21 April 1997

Crime. R v Beattie CA (Ct Div) (Rose LJ, Dyson and Timothy Walker JJ) 11 March 1997. The plea of *autrefois convict* was applicable only where the second indictment charged the same offence as the first indictment, although the trial judge had a discretion to stay the proceedings where the second offence arose out of substantially the same facts as the first. That discretion should be exercised in favour of an accused unless the prosecution established that there were special circumstances for not doing so.

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There was no requirement that the committal charge in an extradition case should identify the statutory provision on which it was based, since the committal proceedings were proceedings in regard to an extradition request, as opposed to "proceedings for an offence" within the terms of r 100 of the Magistrates Courts Rules 1981. *James Lewis (Kingsley Napley) for the applicant; John Hardy (CPS) for the Governor of Britain Prison and the US Government.*

VAT. Customs & Excise Comrs v Help the Aged; QBD (Lightman J) 28 Feb 1997.

Minibuses adapted for carrying wheelchairs in such a way that seats could easily be fitted instead if required were "permanently" adapted for the safe carriage of handicapped persons so that they were zero-rated for VAT.

Michael Ken QC (C & E) for the Crown; Roderick Cordan QC (Wells LJ) for the Appellant.

15 من الأجل

Nomads score a bull's-eye with fees as cost of floating on AIM soars

The cost of joining AIM, the Stock Exchange's junior market established to replace the USM nearly two years ago, has soared.

Nomads, the nominated advisers which all AIM recruits need, are largely responsible for the escalation which, according to some observers, could put the market out of the reach of many of the smaller companies it was created to accommodate.

In the early days a Nomad charge was as low as £25,000; total cost of a flotation could be less than £50,000.

Nowadays most Nomads are unlikely to offer services for less than £100,000. Many do not start to contemplate a new client below £200,000 and stories go the rounds of fees of £600,000 being demanded.

On top of enriching the Nomad - there are 60 - the would-be AIM constituent has to satisfy the bills of accountants and lawyers, possibly up

to another £200,000. The chosen stockbroker also expects a reward.

Then come the out-of-pocket advertising and public relations charges. A resources company must also contend with the costs of geological studies and reports.

The drain on management time, often huge, is another factor. Indeed, one company's top brass is known to have spent so much time on flotation details that for two months it was diverted from the day-to-day function of actually running the business.

The day of reckoning came a few months after flotation when the company had the sad and humiliating task of having to issue a heavy profit warning.

There is also the story of one company which found the outlay for a full listing only £75,000 more than getting a presence on the London market.

The soaring Nomad charges

are said to be due to the tough line now being taken by the AIM team at the Stock Exchange; it is demanding much more detailed research and seems prepared to impose stiff penalties on advisers which have, it feels, not been diligent enough.

AIM casualties have, so far, been few and far between and the Stock Exchange can, therefore, justify its demanding stance.

It has, however, to be careful not to retard the market's progress. AIM, the alternative investment market, has been a remarkable success with more than 270 constituents, worth around £5.8bn. And there is still a steady flow of newcomers.

The AIM team has a delicate balancing act to perform. It is right to demand detailed scrutiny of candidates but it would be a pity if over-regulation is allowed to make the market too expensive.

STOCK MARKET WEEK

DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

Certainly the yearly membership fee imposed by the Stock Exchange is modest, no more than £4,000.

The fringe Ofex market, run

by jobber John Jenkins, is more lightly regulated and very much cheaper. If a newcomer is not raising cash the cost of admittance can be around £10,000.

So far Ofex has suffered one casualty, Woodstock, a pub and restaurants group. It is on the verge of going belly up because the value of its pub assets were overstated at the time of the flotation, when it raised £600,000 through Austin Friars Securities, last summer.

Of course, the fees charged to take AIM pale into insignificance when compared to the riches the City is piling up from the building society rush to convert to plc status.

Share spotlight

Alliance & Leicester, the first to reach the stock market, arrives today with BZW suggesting the shares are a buy up to 520p.

Although 27.5 per cent of Alliance shares have been cashed in, bundled up and sold by auction through stockbroker Cazenove, there is likely to be heavy trading today.

The 27.5 per cent will go a long way to meeting the early institutional demand which the Alliance share sale created. If institutions are content to take their time building the stake Alliance's presence requires then the early turnover stampede may be avoided.

Even so there are worries about the ability of Crest, the computerised settlement system, to handle the conversion.

Many private client stockbrokers remain unhappy about the system, complaining their back-office staff are being forced to work late into the

evenings to accommodate the Crest shortcomings.

Crest is confident it can meet the challenge of the six societies going public although it says it is "not complacent". Today will be the toughest test the system has yet encountered and judging by comments flying around the investment community on Friday its confidence is treated with some scepticism.

Imperial Chemical Industries head the results list. First-quarter figures are due on Thursday and NatWest Securities is looking for a depressing £75m, a 63 per cent fall. But analyst Lucas Hermann believes this week will represent the low point in ICI's fortunes.

His hope is that quarter-on-quarter results will start to improve. SmithKline Beecham is another with first-quarter figures; around £425m, up from £387m, is expected.

Today Premier Farnell,

which stunned the market with a profits warning in January, should produce around £135m.

On the retail front DFS Furniture, which has aggressively pushed into London and the south, is likely to offer interim profits above £18m against £15.1m and Austin Reed looks set to nearly double year's figures to £6.5m.

Laura Ashley, the fashion and furnishing chain being shaken up by Ann Iverson, recruited in 1995, should display an attractive set of figures. Year's profits should be around 50 per cent higher at £15.5m.

The American chief executive has reinvented the group, once renowned for its flowery frocks, which had seemed to lose its way and was running hard just to stand still.

Bank of Scotland also offers figures this week. It should produce around £660m, a 21 per cent increase; a dividend of 8.2p is suggested, representing a 20 per cent advance.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, geared up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items. Other details: 1 Ex rights 2 Ex dividend 3 Ex all 4 Unlisted Securities Market 5 Suspended 6 Partly Paid 7 Nil Paid Shares 8 AIM Stock

Source: FT Information

The Independent Index

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UK Stock Market Report 01 Bullen Report 05 Water Shares 32
UK Company News 02 Wall St Report 20 Electricity Shares 40
Foreign Exchange 03 Tokyo Market 21 High Street Banks 41

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Interest Rates

UK	Germany	US	Japan
Base	6.00%	Prime	8.75%
Discount	4.50%	Fed Fund	5.00%
Overnight	3.50%	Prime	5.25%
3-month	2.50%	3-month	5.00%
6-month	2.25%	6-month	4.75%
12-month	2.00%	12-month	4.50%
Advances	2.00%	Advances	4.25%

Oil Exploration

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
BP	240.00	12.5	1.20
Shell	230.00	11.0	1.10
Esso	220.00	10.5	1.00
Agip	210.00	9.5	0.90
Eni	200.00	8.5	0.80

Oil, Integrated

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
BP	240.00	12.5	1.20
Shell	230.00	11.0	1.10
Esso	220.00	10.5	1.00
Agip	210.00	9.5	0.90
Eni	200.00	8.5	0.80

Other Financial

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Barclays	150.00	15.0	0.50
HSBC	140.00	14.0	0.40
Bank of England	130.00	13.0	0.30
London City	120.00	12.0	0.20
City of London	110.00	11.0	0.10

Telecommunications

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
BT	100.00	10.0	0.10
Telecom	90.00	9.0	0.09
Telecom	80.00	8.0	0.08
Telecom	70.00	7.0	0.07
Telecom	60.00	6.0	0.06

Retailers, Food

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Asda	50.00	5.0	0.05
Waitrose	40.00	4.0	0.04
Asda	30.00	3.0	0.03
Waitrose	20.00	2.0	0.02
Asda	10.00	1.0	0.01

Retailers, General

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Asda	50.00	5.0	0.05
Waitrose	40.00	4.0	0.04
Asda	30.00	3.0	0.03
Waitrose	20.00	2.0	0.02
Asda	10.00	1.0	0.01

Pharmaceuticals

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Glaxo	120.00	12.0	0.12
SmithKline	110.00	11.0	0.11
Glaxo	100.00	10.0	0.10
SmithKline	90.00	9.0	0.09
Glaxo	80.00	8.0	0.08

Printing & Paper

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Wiggins	30.00	3.0	0.03
Wiggins	20.00	2.0	0.02
Wiggins	10.00	1.0	0.01
Wiggins	5.00	0.5	0.005
Wiggins	2.50	0.25	0.0025

Property

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Landsec	150.00	15.0	0.15
Landsec	140.00	14.0	0.14
Landsec	130.00	13.0	0.13
Landsec	120.00	12.0	0.12
Landsec	110.00	11.0	0.11

Life Assurance

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Prudential	100.00	10.0	0.10
Prudential	90.00	9.0	0.09
Prudential	80.00	8.0	0.08
Prudential	70.00	7.0	0.07
Prudential	60.00	6.0	0.06

Media

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
News Corp	120.00	12.0	0.12
News Corp	110.00	11.0	0.11
News Corp	100.00	10.0	0.10
News Corp	90.00	9.0	0.09
News Corp	80.00	8.0	0.08

Government Securities

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Govt	100.00	10.0	0.10
Govt	90.00	9.0	0.09
Govt	80.00	8.0	0.08
Govt	70.00	7.0	0.07
Govt	60.00	6.0	0.06

Support Services

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Asda	50.00	5.0	0.05
Waitrose	40.00	4.0	0.04
Asda	30.00	3.0	0.03
Waitrose	20.00	2.0	0.02
Asda	10.00	1.0	0.01

Water

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Anglo	100.00	10.0	0.10
Anglo	90.00	9.0	0.09
Anglo	80.00	8.0	0.08
Anglo	70.00	7.0	0.07
Anglo	60.00	6.0	0.06

Index-Linked

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Index	100.00	10.0	0.10
Index	90.00	9.0	0.09
Index	80.00	8.0	0.08
Index	70.00	7.0	0.07
Index	60.00	6.0	0.06

Unlisted

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend
Unlisted	100.00	10.0	0.10
Unlisted	90.00	9.0	0.09
Unlisted	80.00	8.0	0.08
Unlisted	70.00	7.0	0.07
Unlisted	60.00	6.0	0.06

do we have to abandon the present?



BILL ROBINSON

'You get scares followed by denials followed by damaging pledges. The scare/denial/pledge syndrome is the main reason we don't have a broadly based VAT system'

Taxing pension funds could be good for our health

General elections are bad for the health of our tax system, because in election campaigns you get tax scares followed by denials followed by damaging pledges. The scare/denial/pledge syndrome is the main reason we don't have a broadly based VAT system. We've seen it happen so often. Party X accuses Party Y of having secret plans to impose VAT on food. Party Y denies it, but the denial is unconvincing until the Minister makes a formal out-of-the-record pledge over to impose VAT on food. The result of this process, repeated in many fields, is that when the election is over a number of sensible policy options have been ruled out.

However there is one area of the tax system - the taxation of companies - that seems to be immune to the scare/denial/pledge disease. Probably because it is so complicated that nobody understands it. That is a pity because it raises some interesting issues that deserve to be debated in the election campaign. Do we have the best system for channeling national savings into investment? Does the City have too much power? Should we give the managers of our large plc more influence?

These issues are all raised by the possibility, much discussed in City circles recently, that Gordon Brown might seek to raise revenue by a further raid on the pension funds. It would be easy to do, and difficult for the Conservatives to oppose, because Mr Lamont showed the way in his last (1993) Budget. That raised £1bn (in a way that few could quite understand on Budget day) by cutting the value of the tax credit given on the distribution of dividends. The option of a further reduction in the tax credit is still there, though it will not be so easy now as the pension funds have marshalled their defences.

Mr Brown will not want to offend the City by imposing a net increase in the corporate tax burden (which would lead directly to a fall in share prices). But suppose he were to use the proceeds from reducing the tax credit to cut corporation tax, in a revenue-neutral reform. He would then be able to argue, as I shall explain, that he was implementing a set of measures designed to increase investment and to ensure that a greater share of profits are reinvested in the businesses that generate them.

Such a reform would address an important economic issue: who is the best judge of how the nation's savings should be invested? Is it the companies which generate a substantial portion of those savings themselves and usually have plans to reinvest them in the business? Or is it the financial institutions which advise the vast pension funds

that now own over a quarter of British industry? It would be very New Labour to wrest these decisions from the City and empower the managers of UK plc.

At the moment the tax system gives strong incentives to companies to give their profits back to the financial institutions as dividends rather than reinvest them in their own business. Those incentives derive from the highly privileged tax status of the pension funds whose views businesses cannot afford to ignore. The institutions have a duty to get the best deal for the pensioners whose savings they are looking after. And in pursuit of that legitimate duty they put pressure on companies to hand back their profits, so that they can pick up the tax credit, rather than reinvest them.

The privileged tax status enjoyed by the pension funds does not simply derive from

the fact that they pay no income tax on their dividend receipts. That is only right and proper. The real privilege is that they also pay very little corporation tax. When a company pays dividends to a higher-rate taxpayer, income tax plus corporation tax is levied at a combined rate of 50 per cent. If the dividends go to a basic-rate taxpayer they bear only corporation tax at 33 per cent. But when dividends are paid to a pension fund, the combined tax rate is only 16 per cent.

There is room for argument as to the proper scale of the fiscal privileges accorded to the pension funds, but what is potentially damaging is that the privilege is limited to distributed profits. Retained profits are taxed at the full corporation tax rate of 33 per cent. The effect of this unequal tax treatment is that if a company reinvests its profits in a project of its own choosing, it has to show a return that is 25 per cent better than the market to satisfy its institutional shareholders. So we have a situation where pension funds are bound to press the managers to distribute rather than retain profits. And that means the City rather than the managers of UK plc determines where the next round of investments are made.

These incentives appear to have had an effect on behaviour. The charts below show that dividend yields are higher in the UK than in any other G7 country, and the proportion of company profits distributed as dividends has increased dramatically since the mid-80s.

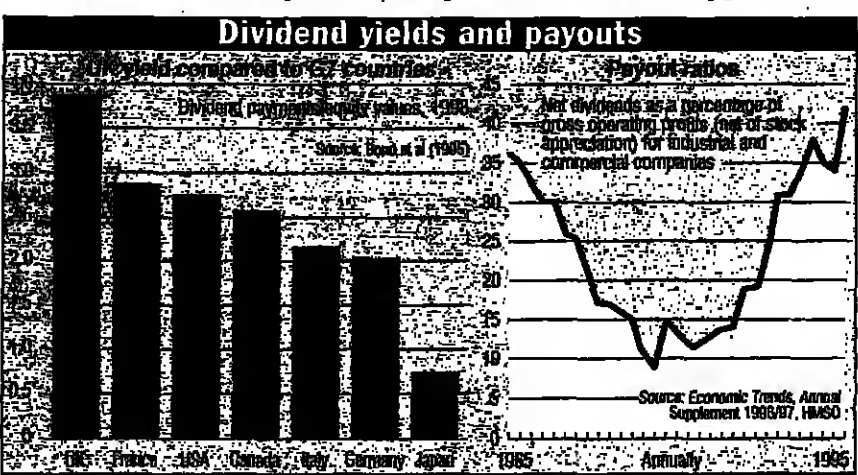
In the light of these facts, Mr Brown might well conclude that the pension funds could afford to pay a little more tax, especially if the money were used to give an across-the-board incentive to investment (ie reducing the corporation tax rate). Taxing the profits distributed to pension funds more heavily to

tax profits retained in companies more lightly is a way of levelling a playing field tilted in favour of dividend distribution.

It is a policy tailor-made for New Labour. Many unconnected voters probably share the view of the Left (eloquently set out in Will Hutton's book *The State We're In*) that the City has altogether too much power and influence. They see the financial institutions which provide money to British industry as short-termist and greedy, demanding large and quick returns on their investments. Things are better organised, many believe, in Japan and Germany where companies are able, without City institutions breathing down their necks, to retain their profits and reinvest them in sound long-term projects.

Reducing the tax break on dividend distributions would reduce, though not eliminate, the strong incentives to recycle profits via the financial institutions. In that sense it would reduce the power of "the City" and increase the power of managers in UK plc. Would it be sensible? My own view is that in a completely tax-neutral world, company managers would probably be too inclined to put money in their own pet projects rather than give it back to the shareholders. The incentives to distribute are a powerful incentive to subject all investment to the most rigorous market tests and in that sense they encourage efficient investment. These incentives may have been too powerful in the past, which is why I think Mr Lamont got it about right when he reduced them a bit in 1993, achieving a much-needed reduction in the PSBR at the same time. But then I would say that, I was advising him at the time!

Bill Robinson is a director of the consultancy London Economics



Unilever facing rebellion over £800m pension fund surplus

Chris Godsmark and Michael Harrison

Unilever, the Anglo-Dutch consumer goods giant, is facing a rebellion by pensioners at the group's annual meeting next month in a row over an £800m pension fund surplus.

The pensioners' action group, the Committee of Unilever Pensioners, plans to challenge the company's decision to use about £300m of the surplus from the fund, most of which will pay for a contributions holiday.

Their battle is the latest to highlight the controversial issue of how companies use, perfectly legally, surplus cash accumulated in pensions schemes. Harley Boyd, a former senior

manager with Birds Eye foods and a Unilever employee for 33 years, said the campaign to improve members' benefits was building up considerable support from the group's 40,000 pensioners. "I've spoken to employees who said they'd prefer to continue paying contributions to the scheme if it gives better pensions benefits at the end of it," he said.

Of the £800m current surplus about £220m was used to give the company and employees a contributions holiday while £70m has this year gone to improve benefits to pensioners. Only those with pensions worth less than £5,000 a year or the very elderly have received the full benefit of the extra cash. The pensioners have also

complained that they have no representation on the fund's 12-member board of trustees. Under the new Pensions Act Unilever has written to fund members asking them to vote to approve the way the scheme's 24 trustees are elected. Half are chosen by the company and half elected by "delegates" picked to represent the workforce.

Mr Boyd, 78, argued that this arrangement was undemocratic. "In effect the management get an in-built majority." At the time in London on 6 May, the pensioners intend to raise the issue with the Unilever board. Unilever said it understood the pensioners' concerns but insisted the scheme had worked well for many years. The row comes as two peo-

sleers fighting a legal battle with the National Grid to recover £40m removed from their pension fund may have to represent themselves in the High Court when the company begins its appeal next month against a ruling by the Pensions Ombudsman.

David Laws and Reg Mayes have been refused funding by the Grid and the trustees of the fund to hire a barrister for the appeal hearing, which has been set down for 19 May.

They have been told in a letter that the Pensions Ombudsman, who earlier this year, ordered the Grid to repay the £40m of a £70m surplus, may not be represented in court either. Unless the two pensioners are granted "pro-emp-

ty costs" at a hearing before the High Court expected to take place next week, they will have to represent themselves.

The outcome of the appeal is crucial since if the High Court upholds the Ombudsman's ruling it could leave the electricity industry facing a pensions bill totalling more than £1bn.

In a landmark ruling the Ombudsman concluded that the Grid had acted unlawfully by removing the surplus and distributing only 30 per cent of it to pensioners.

Meanwhile, in a linked hearing, National Power is due to appear in the High Court next month in a test case to establish whether it, too, acted lawfully in removing a similar surplus from its pension fund.

Chris Godsmark

Radical plans to break up Cordiant, the advertising empire created by the Saatchi brothers, are expected to be confirmed today, ending weeks of speculation about the group's future.

Bob Seelert, Cordiant's chief executive, and Charlie Scott, chairman, are to propose splitting the business into three separate companies, two of which will be publicly floated. The demerger would see Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Worldwide quoted on the UK stock market and Bates, the US agency bought by the brothers in 1986, listed in New York.

The plans sever the remaining links with the Saatchi brothers' ill-fated quest to build their

company into the world's biggest advertising agency. Since the late 1980s the group, formerly known as Saatchi & Saatchi, was hit by a series of setbacks culminating in the acrimonious defection of the brothers, Maurice and Charles, two years ago. They formed a rival agency, M&C Saatchi, which poached the Conservative Party's long-standing account.

The latest strategy, hatched by advisers SBC Warburg, is an attempt to unlock hidden value for investors. Rumours of a demerger have already pushed Cordiant shares up from a low of 96.5p this year to 130p, valuing the company at £577m. Some analysts have suggested a break-up value of up to 200p a share, valuing the separate

businesses at more than £800m. Two years ago Cordiant raised £127m in a rescue rights issue at just 60p a share.

The demerger of Bates is thought to have gone down well with large corporate clients and staff. In the US, Bates has been prevented from aggressively bidding for work from consumer goods companies because Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Worldwide in London counts as one of its biggest clients. Procter and Gamble, the soap powder to foods giant, the final element in the jigsaw is Zenith Media, Cordiant's advertising space-buying arm, which will be jointly owned by the two agencies. The top jobs in the demerger are likely to go to existing executives.

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Queen's Awards

A SPECIAL REPORT

Why it is vital to keep pounding away

Lynne Curry and Martin Whitfield introduce this report on the Queen's Awards to businesses

Exporting is never easy. But the past 12 months have seen the business of selling abroad becoming progressively harder as sterling recovered its strength to stand at levels last seen when the pound was in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

For the 110 winners of the Queen's Award for Export Achievement, today provides an chance to sit back and enjoy the recognition of past performance before rejoining the struggle with exchange rates and aggressive overseas competitors.

The export successes are joined by 16 winners for technological achievement and eight for environmental achievement.

Ian Campbell, director general of the Institute of Export, said the difficulties caused by the appreciation of sterling had already been reflected in a fall in short-term confidence of leading exporters.

He says: "It's getting tougher to sell in overseas markets. A year ago companies were selling to Germany at 2.20 marks to the pound. This year it is 2.80. That makes British goods dearer and German ones cheaper."

The exporters' dilemma is vividly demonstrated by the fortunes of British Steel, one of this year's export winners, with more than half of the company's £8 billion sales going overseas.

Despite the success, British Steel last month announced the bringing forward of a £165m cost-cutting and redundancy programme, partly because of the strength of sterling and the increased competitiveness of other European steelmakers.

Further evidence of the erosion of confidence is expected on Wednesday in the

CBI's latest industrial trends survey. Sudhir Junankar, the CBI's Associate Director of Economic Analysis, said strong domestic demand had helped to replace lost overseas business.

Last month's figures showed 35 per cent of firms said their export order books were below normal, while 17 per cent said they were above normal. He says: "The strength of sterling is beginning to take its toll. Export orders are at their weakest level since November 1993."

New tactics have to be employed in more difficult markets. Many small exporters do not take any precautions against currency movements, but they are increasingly looking to overseas currency accounts.

A range of more sophisticated products offered by banks

to limit the risk on future orders. While currency levels may produce temporary problems for companies, Mr Campbell believes British exporters are in better shape than in previous decades and that longer-term confidence remains high.

He says: "The quality of our export sales is very much higher than it was in the 1970s. We have become far better at making things and at looking after our customers. Exports are not sold solely on price. For example, people who want to buy a Spice Girls record are not too worried about the exact price, they want the record."

No record company is a 1997 winner – the Spice Girls will have to wait until 1998 for their success to register – but there are numerous examples of the

attractiveness of a uniquely British product in overseas markets. Dr Martens shoes, Marks and Spencer clothes and Bass beers show the popularity of British brand names.

Success has come to many aware of the differences of nationalities. Astracast, a subsidiary of Spring Ram Holdings, has investigated the different tastes of European customers in the bathroom with a view to designing products to meet individual requirements. Inversek, a speciality paper manufacturer with plants in Scotland and Somerset, offers bespoke products to try to escape the cyclical nature of the paper industry.

The list of winners also highlights the unsung heroes of the economy. Companies like

Bridgeport Machines, of Leicester, winning its second export award for the sale of advanced computer-aided drilling and lathe equipment, would admit to not being household names. But Ian Smith, general manager international marketing, said the award marked the company out from its competitors.

He says: "Our machines are used to making everything from aircraft parts to chocolate bars. Having the Queen's Award on our paperwork and on our business cards shows we are a quality company that is going somewhere. Everybody likes to work for a successful business."

This year's total of 134 winners is five more than in 1996, but well short of the record 175 winners of 1990.

Applications judged by the Queen's Award panel rose to 1,724 from 1,561 in 1996, the highest level since 1993. About 25 per cent of winners are successful at their first attempt and more than half have never won a Queen's award before.

Nearly a quarter of the export winners and nearly a third of technology successes have fewer than 50 employees and 56 per cent of winners have under 200 staff. They mix happily with international giants like Toyota, Sony, IBM and GPT.

Manufacturing companies dominate the awards with just 11 per cent representing "invisible" winners. Information providers like Business Monitor International which produces risk reports, Financial Engineering (conferences and

book directories) and the Open University Business School are the exceptions. Bartle Bogle Hegarty, the advertising agency, has won a second successive export award for its overseas campaigns for a string of international brand names. Since winning the 1996 award, the company has picked up five new overseas clients and has opened an office in Singapore.

All the winners have the right to use the Queen's Award symbol for five years and are eligible to reapply. 25 export awards, three for technology and two for environment went to existing award holders.

A similar number of entrants are expected for the 1998 awards. Although exporting in 1997 may be tough, Ian Smith of Bridgeport Machines is relaxed about what this means. "You just have to be a little harder. Be a little more active."

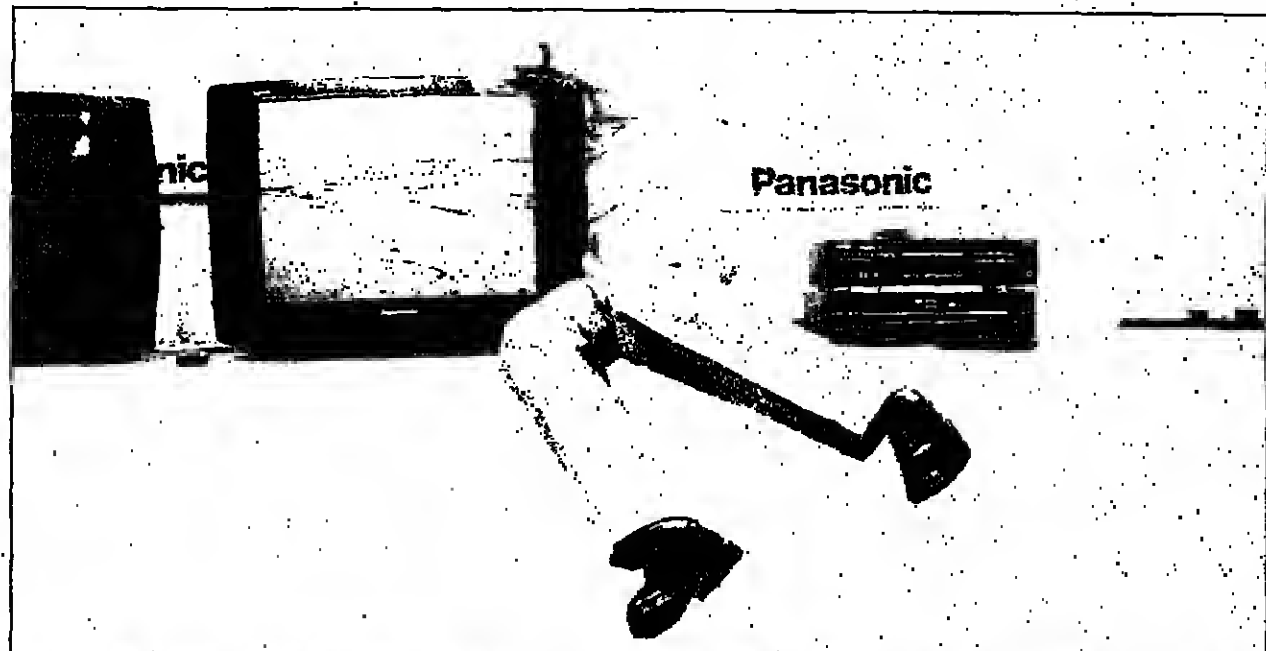
Japanese firms are leading the way

The influence of inward investment is shown by the fact that a quarter of the winners of the Queen's Award for Export have overseas parent companies. American, German, Scandinavian and Dutch companies have long featured in the list of winners, while a new entry is those with a Japanese parent.

Japanese firms have invested more than US\$39 billion in Britain since 1980, a large proportion of the total in manufacturing. Toyota, heading this year's Japanese export winners, was the fifth largest vehicle exporter from Britain. Its effect on the British balance of payments was a positive £444m.

Sony, another famous Japanese name, is one of eight environmental winners. The company is proud of the award which shows a commitment not just to manufacture, but to innovation at its South Wales plant.

The award recognises the gains in a new soldering technique which reduces waste products by 90 per cent by carrying out the process in an



Vision thing: Japanese firms like Panasonic have contributed to the inward investment in Britain Photograph: Rob Stratton

atmosphere of nitrogen, rather than oxygen. An initial investment of £250,000 is producing an annual saving of an equivalent amount, while the technique is being exported to other Sony plants around the world.

Panasonic, through its Matsushita manufacturing arm, has entered the select band of double winners for export. Its plant at Thatcham, near Newbury, Berkshire, won an award for the sale of digital mobile telephones, while the

company's factory at Cardiff exported record numbers of televisions and microwave ovens. Matsushita employs more than 3,000 workers at its two British factories, with exports to more than 50 countries.

Seinosuke Kurata, managing director of Matsushita Electric (Europe), says: "The Queen's Awards are recognised around the world as one of the most prestigious awards for businesses to receive. To win not just one, but two, awards in the same

year is a tribute to the commitment of our workforce and to the quality of our products."

Whisky may seem like an essentially British product, but celebrations over the second successive export win for Morrison Bowmore Distillers will be celebrated in Tokyo as well as its home city of Glasgow.

Morrison Bowmore is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Suntory, of Japan. Exports have increased 75 per cent since the first win in 1996 and represent three-

quarters of production. NEC Semiconductors, another Japanese-owned company, exports over 80 per cent of the production from its plant in Livingston, West Lothian. Bill Gold, senior administration manager, said the company has invested more than £300m since setting up in Scotland in 1982 and now employs 1,600 workers.

He said: "At least four or five other Japanese companies have come here because of us and we are very proud of that."

Percell Group able to count its double gains

Counting money has proved doubly profitable for the Percell Group with Queen's Awards for both export and technology. The company, which employs 60 people in Newport, South Wales, has joined an elite for those organisations winning two awards in the same year. It also won an award in 1996.

Percell's success is based on its range of Tellemate products, electronic counters for bank notes and coins. The company exports to 25 countries and its products are used in banks and in large retailers. The machine, developed by Percell's founder Edgar Biss, allows fast counting of notes by weight and can take account of differences of currency and even the fluctuations caused by the amount of water in the atmosphere.

Mr Biss said he was looking for further growth with the development of new product ranges for Tellemate. He says: "We have an excellent customer base with blue chip organisations which are rapidly expanding their retail operations. We are proud that such a small company can provide these giants with the answer to their own cash management problems."

European Gas Turbines combines exports and environmental achievement for its two successes. The large turbine generators – mainly for industrial and offshore markets – cost around £1m each and are exported from the company's Lincoln factory to 79 countries around the world.

SGT's environmental award is for the development of a new low emission combustor unit for its range of turbines which can reduce the output of Nitrogen Oxide by up to 85 per cent. The design can also be retrofitted to existing machines.

Winning a double award has happened four times for JCB, the Staffordshire-based manufacturer of earth moving equipment. The company has won a total of 13 awards since 1983.

This year's awards are to the Wheeler Loader and Backhoe Loader Divisions. The Wheeler Loader division makes large loading shovels and has seen exports treble to more than £20m between 1994 and 1996. Exports from the Backhoe Division – producing machines for the construction industry – have risen to £180m.

Multiple winners in telecommunications are GPT which has achieved success in both the

export and technology categories. The company, Britain's biggest manufacturer of telecommunications systems, also won an export award in 1996 for its family of voice and data transmission equipment.

The technology award is for the advances with "black boxes" which are at the centre of information technology. New silicon chips developed by GPT mean equipment that used to take up 8,000 shelves in the 1970s, now only takes up two shelf spaces.

The quality of electronic engineering developed by Snell & Wilcock is demonstrated by two technology awards, one shared with Electrocraft Laboratories. Both companies are based in Hampshire and work in commercial television and video.

"Supervisor", a new system, allows the use of large video displays without loss of screen quality. The system allows the use of computer graphics as well as video film. The joint win with Electrocraft involves the introduction of a new test pattern generators for television broadcasters. More compact, the equipment allows unlimited scope and accuracy for test signals.

Where kitsch means cash

The lava lamp and the adjective "naïf" have been in circulation for roughly the same time. Rarely have the two been separated. The lava lamp was naïf when kitsch was a word barely pronounced outside Germany, and irony unknown in home furnishing.

But a happy collision of naivness, kitsch, fashion and irony has kept the lava lamp in production for over 30 years, outlasting many of the seaside tat specialists which were its first stockists. Its unsophisticated appeal is apparently universal and – with some irony – particularly marked in Germany, a country whose fondness for pointless frippery has remained one of its less visible features.

More than 500,000 lamps are now made every year at a totally non-ironic brick building on an industrial estate in Poole, Dorset, and 65 per cent of them go abroad, mostly to Europe. The continental weakness for the rising globules of coloured wax has earned the company its first export award. "The Germans can't get enough," said Fiona Somerville, spokeswoman for the manufacturing company, Crestworth Trading, which now trades as the more symbolic Mathmos, after the evil bubbling force in the film *Barbarella*.

The lamps were invented in



Market eruption: Lava lamps are now in great demand Photograph: Adrian Dennis

inventor's original: wax in water, which heats up when a separated light bulb is lit, and rises in random hubs in the container.

All over the world, the most popular colour combinations, none of which nods towards subtlety, are red wax in violet water, and green wax in blue water. Orange wax in violet water, and red wax in yellow water, are also available, but the orange is thought not quite bright enough yet to rattle the taste barriers.

"They are completely kitsch and we make no pretence that they're not, but all sorts of people love them – elderly and middle-aged people who obviously remember them, down to small kids, and students are great buyers." Original lamps – with their slightly toxic contents, since changed – now retail for about £80, but a new one sells at £49.95 at the company's own British shop in Drury Lane, London, and in gadget and "new age" shops. The basic principle is the

Panasonic GSM



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Queen's Awards

Brewery knows value of keeping business in the family

A Bedford brewery which has removed widgets from its cans and instituted language courses for all its staff has become the first family-owned regional brewer to win a Queen's Award for Export.

Charles Wells, run by the fourth generation of the Wells family, produces Bombardier Ale, judged "England's best" at the Brewing Industry Awards last year. Each week, 16 lorries set out from its Eagle Brewery in Havelock Street, Bedford, carrying 30,000 pints of beer bound for 23 countries.

They include Norway, where Charles Wells beer sells in the most northerly bar in the world, in Hammerfest, and Moscow, where brewery representatives found the Russians deploying redundant nuclear bunkers as cold stores.

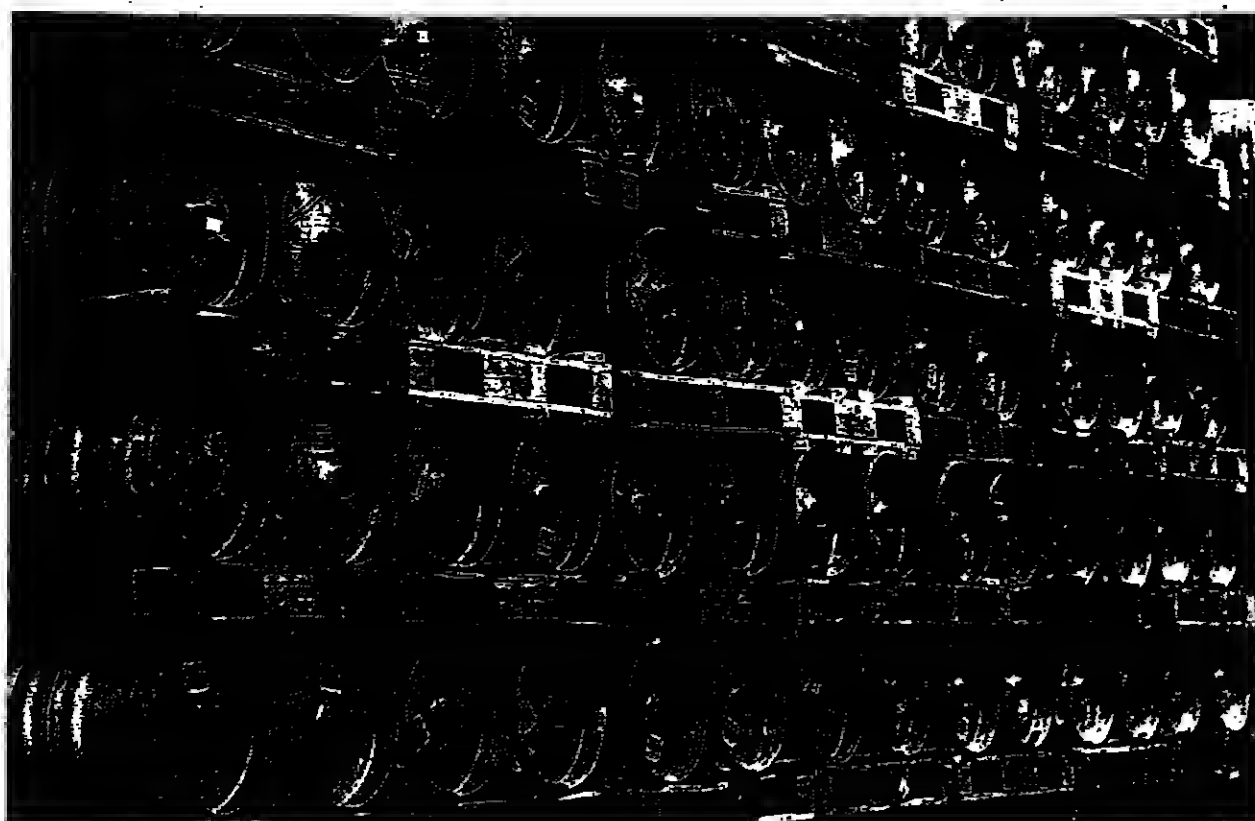
Beer - brewers Bass Beers Worldwide have also won an export award for the second successive year - is joined by breakfast cereals, whisky and sweets as the consumable elements of this year's awards.

While Chambers Candy of Halesowen has made a success

of old-fashioned English sweets, including highly-scented Victorian cachous, and WJordan (Cereals) concentrates on unadulterated breakfast cereals at its mills at Biggleswade, Morrison Bowmore Distillers, carrying a second successive award home to Glasgow, symbolises a contemporary feature in these export awards. Although the product is highly traditional, the ultimate owners are now Japanese (Suntory bought the company in 1994).

The Wells family, meanwhile, is likely to continue for one further generation at least. Peter Wells, youngest son of chairman and managing director John Wells, joined the company this month. His father's cousins, Paul and Tom, are also directors.

Brewers of Fargo, Old Bedford Ale and Bowman beers as well as Bombardier, Charles Wells began to export its products in 1979, when John Wells, then sales director, undertook to learn Italian and secured markets in the United States and Italy. Wells says: "Nobody else of our size was exporting -



Roll out the barrel The Charles Hall brewery, which enjoys great success overseas

Photograph: Emma Boam

we were then one of the smallest flying the flag. We have had 10 per cent of British exports to Italy since the outset. Although we are bigger today, we are still not a national giant, but export more of our brewing output than any of the others."

Mr Wells continued to do all the export work himself until 1985, with the support of his secretary, Valerie Walter - who has been at the brewery for 23 years and who still calls him "Mr John". Although there is now a dedicated export manager, John James, the key to success, according to Mr James, is partly the scale of the operation.

"We are small enough to build a close relationship with our suppliers," said Mr James.

We work closely with our agents and distributors. They are often invited here to the brewery where they can meet a Mr Wells. This counts for a lot - they can't meet a Mr Guinness."

The opportunity to learn other languages has been extended to all the 409 workforce, including the British-Italian employees from Bedford's large Italian community who come to learn "proper" Italian, and to the warehouse staff, where Manohar Lal Tegi, a fork-lift truck driver, can now communicate with Italian drivers as he loads their vehicles.

Three miles off the M5 in the West Midlands, the Chambers Candy Co's premises on a small industrial estate are a far cry

from their product - perfumed comfits, dusted chocolate-covered blueberry raisins, butterscotch and fruit-flavoured drops - and an even further cry from the evocative packaging, embossed and decorated with depicting country cottages or Faberge eggs.

Chambers Candy was formed by Roger Inman and his wife, Marion, who developed their own recipes and packaging. Mr Inman had been managing director of Bluebird Toffee, but from this more robust corner of the confectionery market he could see a call for what might have seemed a fading variety of genteel sweets. He took the plunge and set up his own business.

Mrs Inman says: "It took off quite quickly. We worked very hard on increasing our sales and promoting our products and do a number of exhibitions through the year, particularly the big confectionery and sweets exhibition in Cologne." It is the Americans, however, who are weak for the nostalgic appeal of L'Amour cachous, while the Japanese lap up Oscar and Bertie, two Edwardian bears whose portraits on the tins carry as much appeal as the confectionery inside.

Mrs Inman says: "What we're selling isn't really like a Mars Bar. It's a gift and a keepsake." Three-quarters of the product is exported, to 40 countries, and the workforce now stands at 23.

1997 winners

Export achievement

AGCO Limited; AgriSense BCS Ltd; Agrisystems (Overseas) Limited; Airwair Limited; Always Engineering Ltd; Aquion Ltd; Astracast Plc; Avro International Aerospace; Lawrence M Barry & Co; Bartle Bogle Hegarty Limited; Bass Beers Worldwide Limited; Biotec Research Limited; Biscay Office Equipment Limited; Bisse Medical Equipment Limited; Borden Decorative Products Limited; Bridgeport Machines Limited; British Steel plc; Business Monitor International Ltd; Camborne Holdings Limited; The Chambers Candy Co Ltd; Computational Dynamics Limited; Concept Systems Limited; Conren Limited; Contract Chemicals Limited; Crestworth Trading Ltd; "Mathmos"; Davis & Dunn Limited; James Dewhurst Limited; Electra Polymers & Chemicals Ltd; Electron, A Division of 600 UK Ltd; Ellison Holdings plc; ENIACO Ltd (English Needle & Fishing Tackle Co. Ltd); Eurocast Bar Limited; Europan Gas Turbines Ltd; Industrial Gas Turbine Group; Edey Motors; Edey Motors (UK) Ltd; Texturising Division; The Fin Machine Company Ltd; Financial Engineering Limited; Fletcher Smith Limited; Fresh Catch Ltd; GPT Public Networks Group; Griffin-Woodhouse Limited; Harcros Chemicals UK Limited; Durham Chemicals Division; Henrob Limited; John Hogg, Technical Solutions Ltd; IBM United Kingdom Limited - Greenock site; Jagesund Paperboard (Workington) Ltd; Innovative Technology Limited; International Gases and Chemicals Ltd; International KD Logistics & Technology Support Operations; International Systems and Communications Ltd; Interpack Worldwide plc; Joveresk PLC; Backhoe Loader Division; JC Bamford Excavators Limited; JCB Earthmovers Limited (Wheel Loader Division); W Jordan (Cereals) Limited; Keith Ceramic Materials Ltd; Kingston-SCL Ltd; Lansing Linde Limited; Marks and Spencer Plc; Martin-Baker Aircraft Company Limited; Matsushita Communication Industrial UK Ltd; Matsushita Electric (UK) Ltd; Milair Aviation Limited; Milvan Limited; Molins Tobacco Machinery Limited; A Division of Molins plc; Morgan -

Europe Ltd; Morrison Bowmore Distillers Limited; NEC Semiconductors (UK) Limited; Newbridge Networks Limited; Nimbus Technology & Engineering; International Limited; Nortel Optoelectronics; Novartis Grimsby; Novocast Laboratories Ltd; Oasis Art & Craft Products Ltd; The Open University Business School; Orkot Limited; Orvec International Ltd; PFE International Ltd; Pall Europe Limited; Panax Ltd; Paraflex Limited; Percell Group Ltd; Perfecel Limited; BA Peters Plc; Pfizer Limited; Phoenix Engineering Co Ltd; Pipeline Integrity International; Pixel Power Limited; Planit International Ltd; Plessey Semiconductors Limited; GEC Plessey Semiconductors; Proton Textiles Ltd; RIA Wine Rack Company Limited; Randox Laboratories Ltd; River Don Castings Limited; Schwitzer (Europe) Limited; Shield Diagnostics Limited; Soil Machine Dynamics Limited; Speedo International Limited; Structural Polymer Systems Limited; Surface Technology Systems Limited; Tassator Limited; Toyota Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd; Turbosound; Urbanhurst Limited; Victor plc; Vitacalender; Walter Technology Ltd; Charles Wells Limited; Wolstenholme International Limited; Woodland Potteries Limited;

Technological achievement

Amchem Company Limited; Amersham Life Science (Amersham International plc); Aspect Vision Care Limited (Manufacturing Division); Electrocraft Laboratories Limited; GPT Public Networks Group; ICG Ltd; ICI Explosives Europe; Integrated Display Systems Limited; Perrell Group Ltd; Racial Avionics Limited; Seapa Group - Advanced Products Division; Snell & Wilcox Ltd; Snell & Wilcox Ltd; VLSI Vision Limited; Whipp & Bourne; Zeneca Life Science Molecules;

Environmental achievement

Autoflame Engineering Ltd; Cleveland Cascades; European Gas Turbines Ltd; H & R Johnson Tiles Limited; Laporte plc - Absorbents (Europe) Division; Rolls Royce Industrial & Marine Gas Turbines Ltd; Sony Manufacturing Company Limited; Kingdom Vapour Products Company Limited;

Gold medals galore for sportswear firms

British sports teams struggle abroad, but the winning sides wear British gear. Speedo International, the swimwear manufacturer which clad the Australian and Chinese teams in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, and Proton Textiles, makers of the cloth on the backs of Glasgow Rangers and the German national side, are two of the sports and leisure-wear companies to gain awards.

Aquion drysuits, of Rotherham, a small company established in 1984, whose market includes military and commercial customers as well as sportsmen, is also winning an award for the first time. It operates an oo-line order and processing system so orders can be made during any working day.

George Costa, managing director of Proton, has built up an £8 million business in a field

which seemed doomed. As he studied textile economics at university, to equip him for the family business, he was surrounded by talk of the demise of the British textiles industry.

But next month, his manufacturing plant will relocate from Nottingham to become neighbours of Rolls Royce in Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, in preparation for a £2 million investment on manufacturing

machinery. The Nottingham plant, which has been open for a while, was set up last year, taking over a plastics factory.

The company, set up in 1986, began manufacturing two years ago. Mr Costa's family had been textile merchants, but saw the need to change to have more control.

He said: "We were dealing with manufacturers who preferred vertical manufac-

turing. They were putting down large contracts and wanted to secure supply.

"We started out in dresswear manufacture and brought those lead times to the sportswear market."

The company now exports two-thirds of its sales, mostly to famous names such as Nike and Adidas, who manufacture all over the world. With 10 staff in the London office and 25 in

Nottingham, it is one of the smallest firms to win an award.

Speedo, also based in Nottingham, has grown its sales by 19 per cent every year after deciding to take a global rather than domestic view under its comparatively recent owners, Pentland (which also owns other sporting names including Reebok, Ellesse, Kickers, Lacoste shoes, Mire footballs and Berghaus outdoor wear).



Tattoo you: Entraco, the only remaining British firm in the sewing industry, makes over a million tattooing needles every week.

Entraco is refusing to get needled

A tattoo was more of a military extravaganza than a permanent flesh imprint when Entraco, a descendant of from the English Needle & Fishing Tackle Company, put down its roots 300 years ago. But now Entraco, the only remaining company in a once-thriving British sewing needle industry, makes a million tattooing needles every week. Along with acupuncture needles, fishing hooks and surgical suture needles, they represent the modern face of a company which also continues to produce a weekly total of 11 million hand-sewing needles.

This harmonious blend of the old and new is also found in the boardroom and in the company ethos.

Chairman Victor Barley, 53, started work on the shop floor at 18, in the footsteps of both his parents, having tried and failed to become a professional cricketer, while Martin Ellis, managing director, and Andrew Stringer, finance director, are both graduates in their early 30s.

At the same time as Entraco has had to adapt its methods and margins to modern global conditions, it has made an old-fashioned philanthropic pledge to its 250 workforce.

This is to remain in the Warwickshire village of Studley, where it has been the biggest employer for generations. If it fails to do so, it pays financial penalties.

This year, on completion of a drawn-out management buy-out, the company has won its first Queen's Award for Export Achievement for selling 75 per cent of its output overseas. Turnover, which was £2.3 million when Entraco took over Needle Industries in 1991, is now over £8 million.

One plank of the export base is fishing and Entraco's foreright in producing a finite life for the net-fishing, which has plundered fish stocks.

From a non-existent market six years ago, Entraco has developed a long-line system using stainless steel hooks and swivels

to prevent twisting. It is now distributed worldwide by two Norwegian strategic partners and is a £2 million annual market.

Another is the craft revival, especially in the United States. Barley says: "Hand sewing is declining, but we have benefited from craft activities. We sell a lot of tapestry needles as well as those for quilting - particularly to the States - and upholstery. Then there's tattoo needles and acupuncture needles and other specialist needles, such as glovers' needles."

"We saw a change coming. As hand sewing diminished, we needed to find alternatives. We may yet find a significant market in body piercing."

Entraco is the last of the 100 companies which were making sewing needles in and around Redditch at the turn of the century.

Its past mergers and acquisitions have included probably the best-known name in sewing needles, Millwards.

Its name has been changed from Amalgamated Needles and Fish Hooks to Needle Industries (the English Needle & Fishing Tackle Company was a manufacturing subsidiary of Amalgamated Needles).

And it has been owned by thread manufacturers J & P Coats, amalgamated with Abel Morralls, of Aero Knitting needle repute, and finally sold to the management by Coats Viyella.

Coats remains Entraco's biggest customer, but the needle-maker is turning its attention now to making an impact in the medical industry, currently dominated by three major players and worth £500 million.

Barley pays tribute to the young blood that has helped Entraco to its dramatically increased turnover. Ellis joined the company in charge of sales and marketing in 1993 and pushed it towards a rise in turnover of £5 million over the next four years.

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EVENTS

Perfectly dotty

Exhibitions: You can see the largest photo in the world, 164ft by 4ft, at Digitec '97 from Tuesday until Thursday, hanging in Hall 2, Birmingham NEC. The organisers of this celebration of digital technology aim to introduce businesses and the public to increasing print possibilities. Admission free. 9.30am-5.30pm 0171 357 7299. Alternatively, try "Onedotzero" - the ICA's three-day festival of digital film making. £8.50/£5 (£5/£4 mem/conc) 0171 930 3647. The Mall, London.

Auction: Or go back to the future with Star Wars again with the first ever big British auction house sale of Star Wars memorabilia tomorrow. The star lot is one of only 20 Boba Fett toys ever made (last seen carry Harrison Ford away in a frozen carbonite mould in *The Empire Strikes Back*), which were discovered on the *Antiques Roadshow* before Christmas. Preview today, sale at 12. Phillips auctioneers, London W2. 0171 229 9090.

Exhibition: The UK's first gold (coloured) stamps are out today, marking the Queen's birthday today and golden wedding anniversary this year. At the Stamp '97 exhibition, you will be able to see every other stamp in the Queen's collection for the first time. Wembley Exhibition Centre, London. Starts Thurs 11am-7pm, Fri/Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 10am-5pm. Admission free, 01425 461353.

MUSIC

Back to the Coast

Jazz: The Jersey Jazz Festival which begins on Thursday has musicians from the 40s-60s West Coast period. The trombonist Jiggs Wigham, baritone saxophonist Jack Nimitz, and trumpet/flugelhorn player Buddy Childers are among them, as are Elaine Delmar singing Gershwin. A great chance to see the island too, with a deal from Travelwright of three nights at £172, including a flight from Gatwick or Southampton. On top of that is a three-night/four-day pass for the festival at £35. Ends Saturday.

Opera: Go to L'Elisir d'Amore at Covent Garden tomorrow - if only to hear Angela Gheorghiu's wonderfully rich, clear voice as the capricious widow Adina. Conducted by Evelino Pidó. Ends 9 May 7.30pm/7pm Sat. Very few tickets £32-90. Standing: £10. Day: £19.50. 0171 304 4000.

Classical: Everything Roger Norrington does these days seems to be good and on Wednesday he guest conducts the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in a programme including Brahms' Serenade No 1 in D and Schubert's Symphony No 9. Symphony Hall 7.30pm £5-31 0121 212 3333. On the same night, its former conductor Sir Simon Rattle is at the Royal Festival Hall in London with the Vienna Philharmonic playing Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and Strauss's late *Metamorphosen* for 23 solo strings. 7.30pm, returns only, possibly some standing. 0171 960 4242.

Album: Best 1996 Brit Awards Newcomer band Supergrass have their new album out today, brazenly and unashamedly in it

For *The Money*, on Parlophone. Hear their views tomorrow night on Steve Lamacq's Radio 1 show 6.30-8.30pm.

THE ARTS

Do us a quaver

Theatre: After a standing ovation for their performance last week in Hanover, the Second Stride dance/theatre company, along with DVS presents *Hotel at The Place Theatre* in London WC1 tomorrow night - an opera performed by dancers, with eight couples. Words by leading dramatist (Top Girls, *Serious Money*) Caryl Churchill, music by Orlando Gough and choreography by Ian Spink. Ends Sat. 8pm £10/£5 conc 0171 387 0031. Then at The Dancehouse, Manchester (2/3 May).

Cabaret: The unique, glittering, outlandish Denny La Rue, dubbed by Bob Hope "the most glamorous woman in the world" enters the second week of his nationwide tour, with dates at Southport Theatre tonight £9.50/8.50, £1 off conc (01704 540404), St. Helens (22) £9.50/7.50 conc (01744 451175), Derby (23) £10.50/9.50, £1 off conc (01332 255800), Scarborough (24) £9.50/8.50, £1 off conc (01723 374500) and Broxbourne (27) £12.50 (01992 441946).

Photography: Also at the ICA (see above), the first exhibition of works by Billy Name - friend of Andy Warhol and the man who painted *The Factory* silver - opens this Thursday with a rare chance to hear the artist discuss his work (returns only £6.50, £5.50 members & concs). As Factory Photographer-designate he captured the atmosphere of the Sixties' most famous underground phenomenon but has lived a reclusive lifestyle since 1968. Features stills from Warhol's cinema and theatrical photos celebrating stars of the "silver years" such as Edie Sedgwick and Nico. Ends 15 June noon-7.30pm/9pm Fri £1.50/£1 conc, £2.50/£1.50 conc.

Television: *Swing Time* is the story of election feuds and rivalries between the two main parties: the BBC and ITV. Tales of the rivalry and in-fighting which prompted the shift from cardboard and sticky-back plastic in 1955 to Peter Snow's high-tech box of tricks today. Sunday BBC2 7.25pm.

SPORT AND LEISURE

A leap from the Ark

Charity: see competitors abseil from the bridge of the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal down to a pontoon in Portsmouth dockyard. Proceeds to the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust. Three hundred competitors expect to raise more than £35,000. Sky News, BBC South, Channel 5. 9am-6pm Sat, Sun.

Festival: Fine weather is a superb excuse for some serious beer-drinking and it is the final week of the Holstein Bier Fest in Battersea Park, London, with an event to rival Munich perhaps not quite yet but a wide variety of Holstein beers to be "sampled". Tue, Wed, Thur 5.30-11pm, 12-4pm w/e. Entry £2.50. Sunday 7-10.30pm; extra entertainment. £7.

Clubbing: A one-off combination night on



Wednesday of Japanese cartoon with the considerable hip-hop talents of sometime Radio 1 DJ Tim Westwood entitled *"Juice"*. Hacienda, Whitworth Street, Manchester. 10pm-3am 0115 912 9000

Lambing: The lambing season is coming to an end so take your children to see new-born lambs, and other "real" farming activities at Hall Hill Farm, near Lanchester in County Durham on the B6296. 1-5pm Sun-Fri, closed Sat. £3/£2 child/over 60s £8 families. 01388 730300

CURRENT AFFAIRS

The balancing act

The Economy: The last economic statistics before the general election are out on Thursday. The Office for National Statistics' trade balance figures for March will, positive results pending, no doubt be part of the last-gasp attempt by the Conservatives to persuade us that Britain really is booming.

National Day: Thursday is National Take Daughters to Work Day, with women encouraged to expand ambitions beyond traditional female roles. They will fly aeroplanes, work in factories, going on the trading floor of Lloyd's ... anywhere that mum goes ...

Cash up in Smoke

Pop: Folk/rock/country singer songwriter Johnny Cash (above) makes a one-off London appearance at the Albert Hall on Friday after a re-invention playing "Unplugged". Songs from his album *"Unchained"*, for which Tom Petty was enlisted, should figure, along with songs from the Grammy award-winning album *"American Recordings"* and some "old, well loved favourites". 7.45pm, £17.50, 0171-589 8212

It costs £500 to put up as a candidate at Parliamentary elections. On Thursday week there will be some 2,000 from "fringe" parties whose chances of getting to sit on the green benches of Westminster are, to put it optimistically, non-existent: candidates' optimism is awesome to behold.

In the Wirral the other day one such man spent a fortnight sitting in a tree house, and when they asked when he was coming down he replied: "I intend to come down when elected and go straight from this tree to the House of Commons."

That was an extreme case, but I have always wondered why business does not cash in on this: £500 is a small price to pay for the publicity of candidature and the free mail shot to each constituent that goes with it. A Heinz Tomato Soup Party which can post samples of its good product to 70,000 voters, courtesy of our electoral laws, must be a sound investment.

A red, white and blue election address was put through the door of my eldest daughter's house in London SW11 by the UK Independence Party. Page 1 urged readers to "Vote Ashley Banks. The Man Who'll Put The B Back In Battersea."

It reminded me of the slogan of a Cambridgeshire council candidate, who read: "Why not Mynot?" As he lost, we never found out.

To summarise UKIP's manifesto: take Britain out of the European Union, which will save consumers £10bn a year, return £19bn to the Treasury and cut unemployment by one million. (There's no mention of the downside of resigning EU membership.)

UKIP is tough on crime: - Make the punishment fit ...

Education: - Reading, writing, numeracy for everyone.

Defence: - The strongest possible independent defence for Britain in an uncertain and dangerous world (by which they probably mean Brussels).

You may ring 0891 265278 for the party leader's election address; calls are charged at 50p a minute; the address lasts for a quarter of an hour.

I telephoned candidate Banks at the Battersea branch office, which is situated in Knightsbridge, and we agreed to meet the following morning. He sounded tired and emotional, but pleased to hear from me.

Would 10 o'clock tomorrow morning be a good time? He suggested noon. We compromised.

He arrived punctually at 11am, wearing a red, yellow and blue rosette and a Panama hat with a serious ribbon, and holding in his hands a folded map of the

constituency. Banks is 51, lives in Lincolnshire and Knightsbridge. He traded opals in Australia for some years and is now in the family business - which imports shock-absorbers from Holland. He has two ex-wives but "nothing at the moment except a 63-year-old Rolls-Royce which epitomises all the things we stand for: British, Beautiful, Well-made."

Where is it? It is in a garage with clutch trouble.

The last time I met Mr Banks was at the Waterloo Cup, where he was dispensing sloe gin from a bar built into the back of a Range Rover. Could that not become his replacement vehicle? "The vehicle belongs to someone else; only the bar is mine."

We go to The Castle, a pub in Battersea High Street which is one of his campaign headquarters. He has discovered "this very good ale called London Pride"; Banks orders a pint.

Did he have trouble finding people to sign his nomination paper? His agent, Louise Vaughan - a South African who lives in Highgate - helped him to find sponsors. "A nice old boy with a Wolseley 1903, who has to go off the booze 48 hours before each year's London-Brighton run, was one."

How do you campaign? "I find it easiest in pubs, drinking with people; and I park the Rolls outside and speak into a loud-hailer (I have this ex-French ambassador's chauffeur, sorry, French ambassador's ex-chauffeur) and I say, 'This is AB of the UKIP, the only party that is here to stay.'"

He is considering parking outside schools, and letting the children crawl all over the

Rolls while he gives leaflets to their parents.

Banks has another pint of London Pride. It is 11.40am.

How many of these do you drink in a day?

"Is this for publication?" Yes.

"About three."

His campaign manager arrives, a 75-year-old ex-Spitfire pilot; he orders a double lemonade in a jug and we talk about World War One and virtualising the Mayflower. Banks explains that the campaign manager takes him round the pubs.

I ask how strong the UKIP is. More than 1,000 people came to the conference and the man who wishes to put the B back into Battersea claims the support of many politicians "including a member of the Cabinet, but it would be wrong to tell you her name".

I ask whether it is Bottomley or Shephard.

He says it is Teresa Gorman.

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Scottish Life	58.51

We can arrange this for 25.02 p.m.

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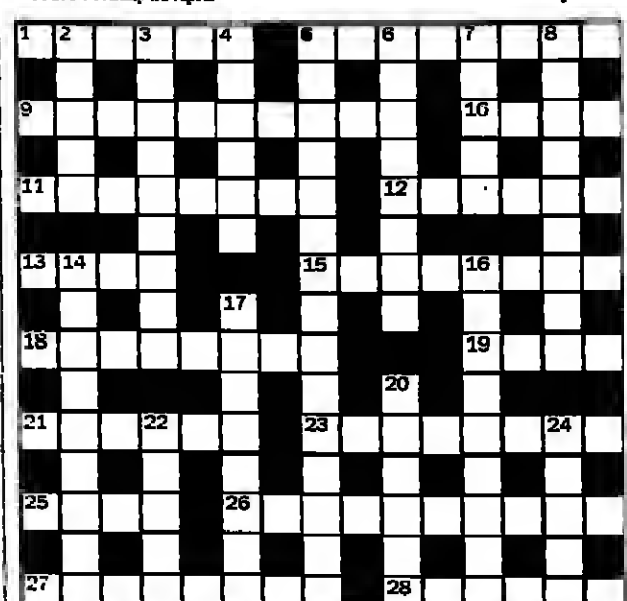
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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3278 Monday 21 April

By Paris



ACROSS
1 Vegetable juice? (6)
5 Ordinary doctor's accepted round about (8)
9 Concerned with host's political affiliation (10)
10 Head off to frequently visit relative (4)
11 Are going all over the place to find girl (8)
12 Confirm time stipulation in note (8)
13 Stone work's completed by top class apprentice (4)

15 Amused to be in a favourable position (8)
18 Fresh brew? (5,3)
19 Bird caught in car headlights (4)
21 Case of senior fellow being up front (6)
23 Do away with post (8)
25 Job for the hand taking up one's musical work (4)
26 Number involved in start of enterprise (10)
27 Difficult kid becomes thug (5,3)

28 Press right into leather strap (6)
DOWN
2 Line up signal, we're told (5)
3 Water colour in the French style (9)
4 Celebrate at home but don't let rip (4,2)
5 Plant is put in after my dahlia's came out (10,5)
6 Persian kings receiving quarter of new moony (8)
7 Choose a direction to take in abstract design (2,3)
8 Barrier one gets round? (4,5)
14 In Italy, wine's the first love followed by sherry (10)
16 Present, past and future (9)
17 Sounds like authentic Scottish castle (8)
20 Seeing that society model is without help (6)
22 Action taken to finish off Greek leader (5)
24 Moving houses artist leaves Irish county (5)